NEW
# NICK CARTER WEEKLY

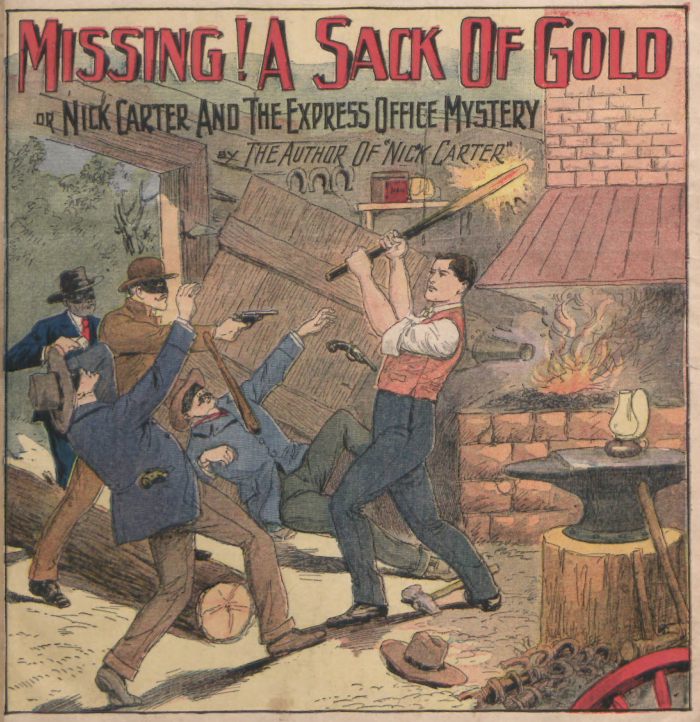
Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 Williams St., N. Y.

No. 450 Price, Five Cents.

# MISSING! A SACK OF GOLD

## OR NICK CARTER AND THE EXPRESS OFFICE MYSTERY

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



Snatching from the fire the red-hot iron bar, Nick Carter sprang forward and struck right and left, heedless of the weapons of the villainous crew.

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No. 450. NEW YORK, August 12, 1905. Price Five Cents.

# Missing! A Sack of Gold;

OR,

## NICK CARTER AND THE EXPRESS OFFICE MYSTERY.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

### CHAPTER I.

THE AMATEUR HIGHWAYMAN.

The Watertown trolley, one evening not long ago, discharged in front of the Cambridge station one passenger. That passenger was Nick Carter. He had just concluded a secret inquiry, involving the recovery of a bundle of compromising letters, and had spent the evening with an old friend in Watertown. He was now on his way to the house of another friend in Cambridge with whom he had promised to pass the night. The house was a few blocks from the station and Nick had to walk by the grounds of Harvard University to reach it.

The night was dark and very still and the streets were deserted. He had just passed the west gate of the university when a man wearing a mask suddenly sprang from behind a tree and leveling a revolver at the detective's head uttered the command in a harsh, but shaky, voice: "Throw up your hands or I'll shoot!"

Nick stopped, but did not obey the footpad's command. Instead, he put his hands to his sides and laughed, not loudly, but softly.

"Hoist your hands and stop your laughing," hissed the masked man. "You'll find soon enough that this is no funny business."

"Excuse me," said the detective, in mock apology, "but the idea of a hold up in staid, moral Cambridge and in front of the great school which teaches morals and good citizenship, and all other good things, struck me as something ludicrous, and"—— There was a tiger-like leap, the pistol was knocked from the footpad's hand, and Nick Carter had him by the throat. In another instant the man was on his back on the sidewalk, and the detective, sitting on his chest, coolly remarked: "I will now, if you insist, finish the sentence which was interrupted by this little divertisement."

"You needn't finish it," whined the footpad, now show-

ing utter despondency, "for I am your meat. It's me to the lockup, I suppose."

"Your case requires consideration," replied Nick. He lighted a match and scrutinized his captive's face. What he saw prompted this utterance: "You are a highwayman from necessity, not from choice. Tell me your story, and mind you do not prevaricate."

"With you on my chest?" The victim was breathing more freely. His next words showed that he was not lost to a sense of humor: "Are you trying to work this into a scene after the 'Arabian Nights'?"

Nick laughed and rose to his feet. "Get up," he said, "and you can talk as we walk."

The man was assisted to his feet. Nick took his arm and they proceeded up the street. "Do you guess why I am treating you so gently?" the detective asked.

"No, I am in the dark. Maybe you are imitating the cat, looking upon me as the mouse, of course."

"Not at all," returned Nick, smoothly. "It's this way: I knew you were a bad actor when you tried to hold me up. Your hand shook and your voice had the jim-jams. And the environment. Highwaymen don't do business in gentle, historic Cambridge. And if by some sport of fate one of these gentry should hit upon this city as a field of operations, he would select any other spot than the university for the opening performance. You are not even a gifted amateur. You are just a plain dub. Don't try it again. The business requires not only experience, but something else, something which I am satisfied you do not possess, and that is, cold, conscienceless nerve."

"I am obliged to you," said the man, huskily. "You have hit it straight enough. I was, up to this evening, an honest man. I came out to rob because my family is starving. Sheer desperation, and nothing else, made me draw that pistol."

"That reminds me," said Nick. "We came away and left the weapon lying on the ground. Let's go back and get it." After they had turned about the detective went on: "Why didn't you pawn the pistol, instead of using it as you did?"

The would-be footpad laughed. "Why? Because it isn't worth five cents. It's rusty, the hammer is broken, and it hasn't been loaded since I was a boy." Nick gave the man's arm a hard pinch. The adventure was turning out more amusing than he had anticipated.

The pistol was found, and the owner was permitted, after Nick had examined it, to put it into his pocket.

Presently they came into the light cast by the electric lamps. Nick had now a good opportunity to examine the face and person of his prisoner. The man was young, not over twenty-five, stoutly built, plainly but neatly dressed, and with a countenance that expressed intelligence and good humor. Not an evil countenance, but a reckless one. The cheeks were sunken and the dark eyes were unnaturally bright. The hands were not those of a laborer. They were well kept, white, thin and soft.

The detective looked the man over a moment, and then said: "You are a salesman by occupation. How do I know?" as the man started in surprise. "By your appearance, your walk, your manner of speaking, and other indications apparent to the close observer, but somewhat difficult to express in words. Even when you commanded me to hold up my hands, there was an involuntary inclination of the head which said as plainly as words, 'excuse the seeming harshing of my voice and the roughness of my demeanor, for the rôle is new to me and I had rather, much rather, entreat you politely to turn over to me your money and other valuables, as a loan, to be repaid when my ship comes in, but knowing that such a course of procedure would fail to profit me, I am obliged, sorely against my will, to use brutal measures.' Your voice, since you have chosen to speak naturally, is soft, slightly appealing—'don't you think this shade is a better match for your complexion than the other?' kind of voice, you understand—and, while we have been walking, you have, as a matter of habit, washed your hands with invisible soap as you were wont to do when behind the counter you stood ready to soft-soap some good-looking customer. These are not your working clothes, but, though they are plain, they are of the latest cut, and your tie, not ready tied, is not so subdued in color as are the ties of the great majority of young men who are neither salesmen in department stores nor college freshmen. Your——"

"You have said enough," the young man broke in, irritably. "I was a salesman up to three months ago. Since then I have been living on the interest of what I owe."

Nick smiled. "There's hope for you," he said, "for a man to win out in this world mustn't be serious all the time. You will never commit suicide, though at a pinch you might commit murder."

"Never," exclaimed the other, with vehemence. "Under no circumstances would I shed the blood of a fellow being."

"I am glad you think that way now," returned the detective; "and I trust the time will never come when you will think otherwise."

They were approaching Main Street. In front of a fruit store, just about to close its doors for the night, Nick stopped. "I had an engagement for this evening," he said, "and I must break it. We will step in here, and you will wait while I use the telephone a minute. Don't try to run away, and don't look upon me as your enemy."

The business over, the detective, his arm within that of the young salesman, passed into Main Street. Halfway up a hill, under a monster elm they sat down. "Now," said Nick, in a business manner, "I am ready to hear your story."

"It's not long," replied the salesman. "I am married, but have no children. My name is Chester Brown, and my home is in old Cambridgeport, near the river. Six months ago I married the daughter of Reuben Speer, of Boston. At one time he was a wealthy shipowner, but unfortunate speculations have within the last few years reduced him to almost penury. He was averse to the marriage, as his daughter had been brought up in a luxurious atmosphere, and it was his desire that she should choose a rich man for a husband. He had picked out one for her, and there seemed to be every prospect for a marriage, when I entered the field. She used to come often to the department store where I was employed, and, meeting her one evening at the house of a mutual friend, I was introduced, and the rest followed. In our case it was an elopement. She left home to become my wife on the day set for her marriage with her wealthy suitor. Her father has forgiven us, but we have not asked for help, for two reasons; first, because he is poor himself, and, secondly, because we both have pride. I lost my situation several months ago. My money soon gave out, and the odd jobs I obtained barely sufficed for our physical necessities.

"A week ago I was at the end of my rope. No work in sight, no money, and nothing to eat. How we have managed to live since then I do not know. Being a man, I have stood it better than my wife. I left her this evening, after we had passed a whole day without food. In a starving condition, and wholly desperate, I set out to enforce my right to live."

There was a pause. Nick had some questions to ask, but he concluded to defer them. The immediate needs of Brown and his wife must be attended to, and at once. Rising to his feet, Nick said: "I will go home with you."

"Then you don't intend to take me to jail?" asked Brown, with a tremble in his voice.

"No, of course not. You have made a mistake. You will not make it again. I am your friend. Come."

Chester Brown poured forth his thanks until Nick stopped him. "Thank your wife, not me," he said.

The house where the Browns lived as roomers was not far from the Harvard bridge over the Charles River. Nick and Brown reached it in half an hour's walk. No lights were visible, and Brown explained the circumstance by saying: "We have been without oil for three days."

Arrived at the front door, the husband pressed the electric button. There was no response. Again he pressed it, with like result. Then he knocked loudly, but no one came to the door, nor was there any movement within. A deadly fear seized Chester Brown. "She—she may be dead," he said, between a gasp and a groan.

"Perhaps she has gone to a neighbor's?" remarked Nick, by way of encouragement.

"I'll soon know what's the matter." So saying, Brown went to the back door, and, finding it locked, threw his whole force against it and burst it in. Nick Carter had his bull's-eye with him, and when it was lighted he handed it to the distracted husband. From one room to another they went, without finding Mrs. Brown, dead or alive.

"My God!" exclaimed the husband; "what does this mean?"

"Read this note and you will probably find out," said the detective. "I found it stuck into the mirror over the mantel in your living room. Strange you did not see it."

"I was not looking for any letter," replied Brown, as he snatched the note from Nick's hand.

Under the light of the bull's-eye the note was read. The first words caused Brown to utter a cry of joy. "She is all right, so she says, and is on Easy Street."

But as he continued to read, his brow clouded, and at the close he said: "There is some mystery here, something I do not like. I trust my wife fully, but to help herself and me she has taken a leap in the dark. Here, read it for yourself. There is nothing in it I wish to conceal. To be plain, I need your advice."

Nick Carter took the note, and with strong interest read the following:

"My Dear Husband: I have left you but for a short time. I have found a way to surmount our difficulties. It came to me ten minutes after you went out. I cannot enter into explanations, for I am under a sacred promise to say nothing until the matter has been brought to a head. But rejoice with me. Our days of poverty and hardship will be soon over. Happiness, such as we never dreamed of, awaits us in the near future. It will be useless for you to seek me. Don't attempt it, but wait patiently for the coming of the bright day for both of us. I shall write to you occasionally, but you must not write to me in return. I know you will be angry over all this mystery, but I entreat you to believe that it is all for the best. Now, be a good boy, and please the one who loves you and would die for you.

"Your own
"Stella."

"Well," said Brown, "what do you think? And what do you think about this bill which was folded up in the note?" displaying a national bank note.

"What does it call for?"

"One hundred dollars."

"Let me look at it."

Brown handed the bill to the detective, who smoothed it out and scrutinized it carefully. Some white particles adhered to it. Nick smelt of them, and then, with no fear of microbes, put his tongue to them. It may be said, however, that he thoroughly rinsed his mouth afterward.

"Bicarbonate of soda," was his remark. "Somebody must carry his money with his groceries." Suddenly a strange look came into his face.

"It's a coincidence, perhaps," he said, "but—did you read the evening papers?"

"No. I have had no stomach for news all day. Why do you ask?"

"Michael Stillfield, the well-known New York banker, was murdered last night. Strychnine was used and the vehicle was bicarbonate of soda. The purpose of the murder, it is supposed, was robbery, for one thousand dollars in one-hundred-dollar bills were stolen from his room."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE GOLD ROBBERY.

At midnight in a Boston restaurant the conversation between Nick Carter and Chester Brown was resumed.

The detective, with an evening paper before him, said: "There was more than a coincidence in that bill matter, Mr. Brown, for the bill which you found in the note written by your wife is on the same bank and has the same number as one of the bills stolen from the room in which the murder was committed. This Boston paper has a complete description of the stolen property."

Brown was horrified at the disclosure. His lips twitched as he said:

"Then the murderer gave the bill to my wife."

"That is not my opinion. It is more than likely that the bill was placed in the note without the knowledge of your wife. If she had known of it, she would have made some reference to it."

"I can hardly believe it, and yet the mystery surrounding my wife's action suggests foul play of some kind. I am bewildered. I don't understand. Why should the murderer of this New York banker seek out my wife, induce her to leave her home in a secret manner, make golden promises for the future, and donate to me an evidence of his crime?"

Before replying to Brown's questions, Nick gave his name and profession. The announcement was received in astonishment, followed by joy. The young man's air of gloom and fear disappeared. He looked at the detective with bright, hopeful eyes.

"You desire to know what I think?" said Nick. "Well, I think that the man who planted this bill is the murderer of Michael Stillfield. And I think, further," gazing at Brown curiously, "that the intention of the murderer was not to assist you in your dire need, but to place a rope around your neck."

Chester Brown regarded Nick with blank astonishment. "Place a rope around my neck," he repeated. "I am more at sea than ever."

"And I am not yet on solid ground," returned Nick; "and I will not be until I have struck the root of this mystery. But it is plain that you have in some way incurred the enmity of the murderer, for he has taken quick opportunity to direct suspicion in your direction. Had you changed that bill within twenty-four hours, as you undoubtedly would have done had you not met me, you would have been under arrest within an hour after the transaction."

Chester Brown passed his hand over his forehead in deep perplexity.

"You have found a riddle you cannot solve, I perceive," Nick remarked. "Well, it must be solved. There was a motive, a deep motive in this action of the murderer. He not only wished to divert suspicion from himself, but he wished to punish you. I have no doubt that should your arrest have taken place other evidence, strongly circumstantial, would have been forthcoming. The man who planned the scheme to entrap you had other cards up his sleeve. The abduction of your wife, for her disappearance amounts to an abduction, shows that the mystery has ramifications, and that the murderer hopes to gain more by the unconscious aid of your wife than he gained by the robbery of Stillfield's room. By the way, have you been in New York recently?"

"Yes, I came from there to-day."

"You did? And how long were you there, and what sent you there?"

"Some one played a dastardly joke on me. Day before yesterday I received a letter, signed only 'Your Well Wisher,' telling me that a situation was open to me in a big department store in New York, and requesting me to come on at once and arrange matters with the proprietor. I went to a friend and borrowed money for the trip. Arrived in New York, I hastened to the store, to learn that there was no place vacant, and that I had been imposed upon. I had to pawn my coat to get money for my return passage."

"You were, then, in New York on the night of the murder of Stillfield?"

"It seems so. But what of it?"

"What of it?" looking at Brown in pained surprise. "Why, don't you see that if arrested you can't prove an alibi? It was the murderer who sent you to New York, and his object was to put you in a hole. If you had remained in Cambridgeport there would have been no object in supplying you with this stolen bill. Now do you see?"

"Yes, I see, but I can't understand the motive."

"That must be ascertained." The detective paused and knit his brows in thought. After a few moments he continued: "From a further consideration of the matter, I think that the robbery of the room was a blind; that the murder was committed in pursuance of a carefully arranged plan to loot the estate. Your wife must be related to the man who was killed. If she is, then the murderer's plot becomes revealed. He is holding your wife under some specious pretext in order to coerce her to assign to him her interest in the estate. She is evidently ignorant of her good fortune, has small knowledge of the law, and in her distress, and actuated by her

love for you, she has lent a willing ear to the villain who has set about to encompass her ruin and yours."

Chester Brown groaned. "We must find her; we must find her," he said in anxiety and fear, "and not a moment must be lost."

He rose to his feet as he spoke. Nick laid a restraining hand upon his arm. "I have concluded to go into this case," he said, "and if you have faith in me you must do as I say."

"I shall be glad to follow your directions, Mr. Carter," replied Brown, quickly but earnestly. "But—I *must* find my wife."

"You will not find your wife, if you start out to make the search yourself," said Nick, decisively. "Leave that detail to me, and while I am engaged in the search you must go into hiding. Your enemy, as you now know, has designs on your life. Therefore you must keep out of sight. And, another thing, you must give me that compromising bill. Here is another, a harmless one, to take the place of it."

The exchange was made, and then Nick proceeded: "When we leave this restaurant you must hunt up a hiding place. Do you know of one?"

"Yes. I have an old friend in South Boston who will gladly receive me."

"Does your wife know that you possess this friend?"

"No."

"What is his name and business?"

"His name is Robert Fulke and he is in the hardware business. He was at one time a partner of my father. A better man never breathed. I can depend upon his sympathy and his loyalty."

"Good. Go there and I will communicate with you whenever there is anything of importance to report."

"And—how shall you go about your search, Mr. Carter? I am curious as well as anxious."

"Unless something intervenes to render the work unnecessary, I shall first try to discover how she left Cambridgeport, by car, in carriage, or afoot. If I learn how she went, I shall try to find out in whose company she went; that is, I shall try to obtain the man's description, if I do not succeed in obtaining his name."

"And what is your expectation?"

"To tell the truth, I do not expect to get either the description or the name. Your enemy, the murderer, is a cunning rascal, and it is hardly provable that he was reckless enough to show himself to any person when he was with your wife. Further action on my part may depend upon information obtained from you, Mr. Brown."

"How can I help you? I have no more idea than the man in the moon who this arch-enemy is."

"Has your wife any rich relatives?"

"I never heard her speak of any."

"Did you ever hear her speak of Michael Stillfield?"

"No, never."

"Have you any rich relatives?"

"No. My relatives are few in number and they are all poor."

"I believe you said your father-in-law lives in Boston."

"Yes, but he is away at the present time. His health is not good, and about six weeks ago he left for Southern California."

"When did you last hear from him."

"A week ago. He wrote that his health had not improved."

"Who are your wife's relatives?"

"James Speer, an uncle on her father's side, living in Australia, and Cynthia Robbins, an old maid aunt on her mother's side, living in Maine."

"No cousins?"

"No."

Nick remained lost in thought for some moments. Then he said: "What is the name of the wealthy man to whom your wife was engaged and whom she threw over to marry you?"

"Selden Dorr."

"Did you ever see him?"

"Yes."

"Describe him."

"He is a man of fifty, or thereabouts; medium height, thin, dark complexion, snappy, black eyes, sunken cheeks, and a hook nose. His hair is slightly gray, and so is his mustache. He wears no beard. He is a shrewd fellow, and a man who has traveled much and has a vast fund of information on all sorts of subjects."

"In what did he seem specially interested?"

"Money, mines and mechanics."

"How was his money acquired? Do you know?"

"He claimed to have made it in Australia."

"About his voice? Was there anything peculiar in his utterance?"

"Yes, he talked with a slight lisp."

Nick Carter nodded his head. "I think I have met the man," he said.

Chester Brown would have asked a question, but the detective forestalled it by saying: "Your statement has put an idea into my head. There may be something in it. If there is you shall know all about it at the proper time. And now let us part. I think I can promise you that your separation from your wife will be short. Good-night."

Nick went to a Washington Street hotel and there passed the night.

The next afternoon brought a new sensation. The dailies published the particulars, as far as they were known, of one of the most daring, as well as the most mysterious, robberies that had ever taken place in New England. The plunder was a sack of gold containing twenty thousand dollars.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE STILLFIELD MURDER.

The sack of gold had been taken from the vault of the Hancock Express Company, and the safe had not been forced. One of the employees, a bookkeeper, with years of honorable service, whose honesty was beyond question, had placed the sack in the vault at the close of business on the day before, and the vault had been locked and the time-guard placed by the cashier. In the morning the cashier opened the vault, to discover that the sack of gold had been stolen.

What was remarkable, no attempt had been made to open the safe where the loose coin and the paper money of the company were kept. The thief had been content with the possession of the sack. There was no indication that either the vault lock or the time attachment had been tampered with.

Prostrated by the discovery, the cashier had called a meeting of the directors, stated what he had found, and asked that he be suspended pending an investigation. He had been in the employ of the company for thirty years, bore a high reputation, and was one of the heaviest stockholders. The directors refused to suspend him, but upon his insistence permitted him to make good the loss from his personal funds.

The chief of police and a number of detectives were in the express company's office when Nick Carter put in an appearance. His arrival was hailed with pleasure, and the president of the company at once took him aside.

"I am glad you are here, Mr. Carter," he said, "for this is a case which calls for the best detective brains in America. The members of our local force will do all they can, but I fear that the matter is beyond them." Further conversation ensued, and Nick agreed to take the case.

In coming to this determination he was possessed with the conviction that it bore a relation, in fact, was a part of, the case involving the murder of Michael Stillfield and the disappearance of Stella Brown.

He was to have his conviction strengthened before he left the office.

After all the employees of the company had been examined by the chief of police and the local detectives, they were turned over to Nick. It may be said that up to this time they had given no information that tended in the slightest degree to throw light on the mystery. The cashier was first taken in hand.

"At what time did the sack of gold reach the office?"

"It arrived on the Australian steamer yesterday forenoon, consigned to our care, for delivery to the owner in New York."

"His name?"

"Michael Stillfield, the man who was murdered."

"Go on."

"It reached this office late in the afternoon, an hour before closing."

"Did you see the bookkeeper when he put the sack into the vault?"

"I did, for I was obliged to lock the vault immediately afterward. It was closing time."

"Do you know that the sack contained twenty thousand dollars?"

"It contained gold bars of the value of twenty thousand dollars. The bars were eighteen inches long and there were eight of them."

An hour was spent in examining other employees, and when Nick left the office he had succeeded in obtaining one item of information.

Selden Dorr, the wealthy suitor of Mrs. Brown before her marriage, had been in the office at about the time of the arrival of the sack of gold, and had expressed a small package to New York. The address was No. — East Fourteenth Street.

The express office was located at the corner of an alley, and Nick was of opinion that the robber had entered the office by the alley door, which was used mainly by the drivers of the company. The patrolman of the night beat was hunted up—his room was but a block from the express office—and he said that he had seen no suspicious characters on the alley the night before.

"You are away from the alley fifteen minutes at a time, are you not?" asked Nick.

"Yes."

"Then the office might have been entered during one of your absences."

"It might have been, yes, but somebody must have seen the robber when he came out. He couldn't have carried that sack of gold far without being observed."

"Were there any cabs or hacks on the alley last night?"

"One cab. It stood for an hour or more in front of a saloon."

"Whose was it?"

"I'll have to own up that I don't know. Maybe the saloon keeper can tell you."

Nick went to the saloon. The night man was there and he said he had seen the cab and it was a strange one. Supposed it had come from out of town and that its fare was taking in the sights.

"Did you notice the driver?"

"Yes, but I didn't catch sight of his face. His overcoat was drawn up over his ears and his hat was pulled down over his eyes. He appeared to be asleep most of the time."

"When did the cab leave?"

"About midnight, I think."

Nick made no further investigation. It was easy to figure out how the job was done.

The cab had been driven by a confederate, and at the right moment had picked up the robber and the gold at

a point near the express office, probably at a hallway just below the side door. There was no need to hunt further for clews. The detective believed he knew the man who engineered the job, and the next move must be in the nature of an attempt to catch him.

Before starting for the express office, Nick had phoned Chick and Patsy, and he now made use of the wires to send Chick further instructions. This business off his mind, he went to a Beach Street hotel, registered, and had dinner. Later he scanned the register, not as Nick Carter, but as a bewhiskered cattle man from Oklahoma. This hotel had been Selden Dorr's headquarters while he was courting Stella Speer, and there was the possibility that he might still be staying there. The register giving no information, except of a negative kind, Nick turned to the clerk.

"Is Mr. Dorr a guest of the hotel?"

"Yes," was the answer; "and he is in his room now, I think. Do you wish to see him?"

An affirmative reply was given. Nick wrote, "Ezra Pooler, Guthrie, Oklahoma," on a card, and in a few minutes was informed that Mr. Dorr would be pleased to see him.

A large, grizzled man, of shrewd, honest countenance, met Nick at the door of the room. His speech had the Western flavor, and after inviting the caller to be seated, he said: "I knew a Pooler in Tombstone, Arizona, in the early eighties. Philo were his name. Relation, I reckon, brother, perhaps."

"I never heard of Philo," replied Nick, with a smile, "though he may be a cousin. Talking about cousins," he went on, "brings me to the object of my call. Have you any cousin who bears the same name as yourself?"

"No, but there's a fellow in this town who goes by my name. Found it out when a man came to my room one day to inquire about him. Thought I was the man, and was surprised when he saw I was another hombre."

"Have you ever seen this other Selden Dorr?"

"Never. He doesn't stay at this hotel, though he gave the chap that came to see me the impression that he did."

"You might go further," said Nick, "and say that the other Selden Dorr allowed some people to think that he was a man of means like yourself; in fact, that he was the genuine Selden Dorr, of Oklahoma, who has rooms at this hotel."

"That's right," returned the cattle man, "and I should like to meet the rascal. I should be pleased to introduce him to the toe of my boot."

"What was the name of your caller?"

"Reuben Speer, an old resident of Boston, and as square as a die. I made some inquiries about him after he left."

"When was the call made?"

"About three weeks ago."

Nick reflected. This must have been just before Speer started for Southern California.

"I liked Speer," continued Dorr, "though I saw him but once, and was in his company for only half an hour. He was a man after my own heart. I am sorry he is dead."

"Dead!" ejaculated Nick, in intense surprise. "When did he die?"

"At seven o'clock night before last. His lawyer stays at this tavern, and I was playing chess with him when the telegram came."

"Did you learn all that the telegram stated?"

"Yes. There was the announcement of the death, and this was followed by a request that Speer's married daughter and only child be notified."

"Was the notification made?"

"Not that night. The lawyer—his name is Highman—said he would defer the notification until next morning. If he went at once to Cambridgeport, where the daughter lives, he would probably find her in bed. He preferred not to startle her with the sad news at such a time. 'The morning will do,' he said to me."

Nick Carter had but a few more words to say to the Oklahoma cattle man. When he left the hotel his face wore a serious expression. The intelligence of the death of Mrs. Brown's father, coupled with the disappearance of Mrs. Brown a few hours after the death was made public property, appeared to add strength to Nick's theory of the plot that had been concocted by a master villain.

Lawyer Highman, the confidential agent of Reuben Speer, had his office on Washington Street, near State. Nick, on his way to the office, in the hope of finding the lawyer in, though the day was closing, became aware that he was being followed. A small man, in a shabby black suit, and with a face like a weasel, was the shadower.

As Nick stepped toward the elevator to ascend to the floor upon which the lawyer's office was situated, he saw the man pass him and quickly mount the stairs. Nick went up in the elevator, but when he reached the right floor the man was nowhere to be seen. With a smile on his face, the detective walked toward the lawyer's room. To reach it he had to enter a short lateral corridor. Halfway to the office door he stopped, wheeled, and walked rapidly back to the main corridor. As he reached it he came face to face with the shadower.

The man started at sight of the detective, and as Nick put out a hand to take him by the shoulder he broke into a run. The elevator at this time was at the floor above, the highest in the building. Instead of making for the stairway, the man, with Nick close on his heels, ran to the elevator shaft, and, seizing the rope, proceeded to slide down. At this moment the cage began a rapid descent.

Nick might have signaled the boy in charge but for

the fact that he was running down the stairs at the time. At the second story the detective heard something crack with a loud report. The elevator stopped at the main floor.

Divining what had occurred, Nick hurried to the basement, and found the shadower crouched near a stairway leading to one of the stores above. He was badly bruised, but no bones were broken. At the second story he had let go the rope, believing that he was about to be crushed to death. The fall to the elevator pit was nearly twenty feet, and when he found that he was alive he crawled out to the place where Nick discovered him.

In the janitor's room he was given a drink of whisky and otherwise ministered to, pending the arrival of the hospital wagon. When he was able to talk he answered freely the questions which Nick put to him.

"Yes," said he, "I was paid to pipe you off. I don't know the piker who hired me. I met him up near the Hancock Express office, and he said he would give me five dollars if I would keep an eye on you and find out where you went, and, if possible, what you did to-day and to-morrow."

"Did he tell you my name or business?"

"No. All he said was, 'I am interested in that Sandow imitation, and I want to know what places he visits to-day and to-morrow. And I would like to know what he does. Shadow him and report to me to-morrow evening, and you get five dollars.'"

Nick asked for a description of the man, and the shadower said: "He was well dressed, medium sized, dark haired, smooth faced, and hook nosed."

"Where were you to report?"

"Beach Street, opposite the Southern Union Railway station, at eight o'clock."

Nick handed the man five dollars. "You will not report," he said, "and you will not make any attempt to find the man when you get out of the hospital."

"Little danger of my finding him," said the shadower, "for I don't know where he lives, and I don't know where he hangs out. Never saw him in my life before to-day."

Nick went on the wagon to the hospital, and was informed by the surgeon who examined the man's bruises that it would be a week before he would be able to leave the hospital.

Patsy was expected on the next morning's train from New York, and Nick was at the depot to meet him. Together they went to Nick's room, and there compared notes and arranged plans.

The story told by Patsy was an interesting one.

"What I have to tell you, Mr. Carter," he began, "covers what both Chick and I found out up to the time I left New York. I know all about Stillfield and I have seen the will. The old man made his money in Australia and owned mines there when he died. His true name is James Speer, and his only living relative is Reuben Speer, of this city, and Reuben is the sole devisee under the will."

Nick Carter was not surprised at this piece of news. In fact he had looked for it.

"Why did he change his name?" he asked.

"To escape the persecution of a man who once had him in his power. In a letter Stillfield left among his papers, and which the old man's lawyer permitted Chick to read, the whole story is told. A few years ago, shortly before Stillfield came to New York, his mining partner was murdered. Stillfield was innocent of the crime, but there was strong circumstantial evidence against him. This evidence was in the possession of a scoundrel whom Stillfield had befriended because the man was an American. This man—Clint Barto is his name"—Nick started, then narrowed his eyes and stroked his chin—"blackmailed Stillfield or Speer until the old man determined to leave Australia. During a week when he knew his enemy was a hundred miles away, he secretly arranged his affairs, selected a trusty agent, and as Michael Stillfield sailed for the United States. Before going to Australia to seek his fortune, Stillfield, or Speer, had a falling out with his brother, and during his years of absence from America he held no communication with Reuben. Now, with his new name, he determined to keep his return to his own country a secret, though he harbored no malice against his brother. He was a bachelor, very eccentric, and had but few friends."

"The newspapers gave the details of the poisoning as far as could be ascertained," said Nick. "Have you discovered anything in addition?"

"No. The whole affair is wrapped in mystery. The old man had but one servant, who was cook, housekeeper and valet, all in one. This man had been in Stillfield's service for twenty years, and is absolutely above suspicion. As you have heard, the old man was a sufferer from indigestion, and was accustomed to the frequent use of bicarbonate of soda as a means of relief. The soda he bought in bulk from a drug store, and it was kept in a trunk in his bedroom. In respect to this medicine, he always waited on himself. The night of his death the servant saw him take his usual dose. A short time afterward, while the servant was in his own room, which adjoined that of his master, he was startled by a scream of agony coming from Stillfield's room. Hurrying in, he found his master in the throes of death. A physician was quickly summoned, but too late to see the old man alive. From the servant's description, the physician was satisfied that Stillfield died from strychnine poisoning. To make sure, an autopsy was held, and the presence of strychnine was detected in the stomach and other organs. The package of soda in the trunk was analyzed, and a curious discovery was made. About one-fourth of the soda, the upper portion, contained enough strychnine to kill a regiment. The other three-fourths exhibited not a

trace of the poison. From this circumstance the inference was drawn that the original package had not been poisoned: The poisoner had brought to the house soda of his own which he had prepared, and which he placed on top of the soda in the old man's trunk. This foul work must have been done some time during the afternoon, for Stillfield took a dose in the forenoon, and with the usual helpful result."

"Was the old man absent from the room at any time during the afternoon?"

"Yes. He went out for a walk, accompanied by his servant, at two o'clock, and they did not return to the house until five."

"Was no one seen going toward, or from, his room during his absence?"

"No, and yet a dozen men might have gone to and departed from his room without their presence being remarked. The house is one of four flats, out Harlem way, and Stillfield occupied the second floor. People were passing in and out all day. Busy in their own apartments, it was not likely that any of the women—the men were all away—should notice who came up or down the stairs, or should know what was going on in the other flats. All the inmates of the house who were at home that afternoon have been interviewed, and not one of them saw any stranger enter or leave the house during Stillfield's absence."

"Who occupies the other flats?"

"The first—that's the basement—is occupied by a German brewer and his family. The German has lived there for five years. The third story has as tenants a Mrs. Lavelle and her invalid husband. The fourth and last is occupied by a department store clerk, his wife, and two grown-up daughters. The clerk has occupied the flat ever since the house was built, twelve years ago."

"Did either you or Chick see the invalid?"

"No. The excitement over the murder proved too much for his nerves, and his wife had him removed a few hours after the discovery of the old man's death."

"Was he interviewed before he left the house?"

"A patrolman asked him a few questions, but he knew nothing. He is bedridden, and had been staying in a darkened room. His wife went with her husband, and was gone several hours. After her return she remained in the flat, packing her things, until night. I saw her and we had a long talk. She is a sharp, handsome woman, of about thirty-five. It was her belief that Stillfield committed suicide."

"Had she any reasons for so believing?"

"General reasons, that was all. She said the old man was in ill health, nervous as a cat, and did not seem to get any comfort out of life."

"Did you know when she went after she left the house?"

"No. You don't suspect her, do you?" looking at the great detective in surprise.

Nick regarded Patsy with pitying eyes. "I am afraid this woman, with her good looks, and her winning ways, has cast a spell over you, my boy. I do suspect her, and though you failed to locate her after she went away, I am satisfied that Chick will do the trick." The invalid is a most interesting subject. What kind of a looking man is he?"

"He was never seen by the neighbors, and when he was taken away he was so bundled up that his face could not be observed. The patrolman, however, saw his eyes and nose. The eyes were black and keen and the nose was hooked."

Nick Carter, who had been smoking, threw his cigar away and rose to his feet. "Patsy," he said, in a tone of extreme satisfaction, "you have redeemed yourself. You did not follow the woman, but you did get a description of the man, and just at this moment that description is of paramount importance. The invalid Mr. Lavelle is the murderer of Michael Stillfield."

## CHAPTER IV.

### NICK LAYS A TRAP.

Patsy's eyes opened wide at Nick Carter's statement. "Now, listen to my end of the story, and then I will give you my theory," continued the detective.

After telling Patsy of the strange meeting with Chester Brown, of the mysterious robbery of the express office, and the peculiar actions of the bogus Selden Dorr, Nick said:

"A cunning plot, involving murder, abduction, and the arrest on a hanging charge of an innocent man, the whole contrived to obtain the fortune which Stillfield, or Speer, possessed at the time of his death, had its inception in the brain of the most dangerous criminal in America. His true name is Clinton Barto, and he has but recently returned to the United States, after an absence of many years. The criminal hunters of the country, myself among the number, have, for three years, looked upon him as dead, for a report came from China that he had been killed in one of the Boxer uprisings. But I know that he is alive, and either in Boston at this moment, or not many miles from here.

"Ten years ago there was not a criminal in the country that was more feared than this same Clint Barto, for he was the most expert safe robber in the world. No vault, no safe that was ever invented, was proof against his satanic manipulations. It was never necessary with him to use dynamite or any kind of explosive. And he could open any safe that was ever made without breaking locks or in any way damaging the money receptacle. I will tell you a story about him in order that you may understand and appreciate his wonderful power.

"Some years ago an order arrived at the sub-treasury in one of the large Western cities to have all the time locks on the vaults cleaned. Among those that were taken out was one on a reserve vault containing twelve millions of dollars in silver. From the lock on the door of this vault the locksmith took only such parts as needed to be cleaned, leaving the rest in the door. When the vault was closed the tumblers fell into their places, the catch of the time lock, or the part that was left caught all right, and the door was securely locked. It was so securely locked, Patsy, that it was found impossible to open it again, for the part of the time lock that should remain the catch on the inside was outside in the hands of the locksmith.

"The combination knob was turned this way and that, and everything that would in any way tend to loosen the bolt was done, but to no effect. The locksmith even went so far as to put a plank against the door and pound away with a sledge, in the hope that something would give way, but still the door remained securely closed, and, as there was really no immediate necessity to open the vault, the treasury seal was placed on the door, and things remained as they were.

"It soon became apparent, however, that something had to be done. Clint Barto was then in town, having recently been released from the State's prison. He was playing off as a reformed man, and the bankers were stalking him for hotel and spending money bills. It was to their interest, you see, to keep him out of temptation. And all the time Clint was waiting for a good opening to begin business again. Some one suggested that he be called in to look at the vault. The matter was considered at length, and it was finally resolved to resort to his skill. Clint went to the sub-treasury and at once went to work. He tinkered with the combination knob for a while, and then, getting down to business, put his ear against the door and began slowly to turn the knob back and forth, listening intently to the clicks of the tumblers as they fell into their places.

"How he did it no one of the bystanders could determine, but it is a cold fact that his manipulation of the knob affected the time lock some way, for he suddenly straightened up, grabbed the lever that moves the steel bolts, and after giving it a quick, sharp jerk, the door swung open before the astonished spectators. Barto hadn't said a word about the lock when he started to open the door, and all that the sub-treasurer could say was, 'Clint, you are a wizard.'"

"It is no wonder the bankers of the land rejoiced when they heard he was dead, Mr. Carter."

"And how do you feel when they learn that he is not? Perhaps it is best that, for the present, they be kept in ignorance of his presence in New England. A supplement to the truth will help me in this Stillfield-Brown case. And now I'll tell you what I think. Stillfield did not fool Barto any when he left Australia for New York. The old man thought he had covered up his tracks, but he hadn't. Barto followed him with the intention of robbing Stillfield of all his fortune. He had been intimate with the old man, and he probably knew that at Stillfield's death the fortune would go to Reuben Speer, the brother. He laid devilish plans accordingly, for he perceived that the only way by which he could hope to secure the fortune was through Reuben Speer or Reuben Speer's heir, his daughter.

"He came to Boston after getting the lay of the land in New York, and as Selden Dorr, a millionaire, obtained an introduction to Reuben Speer and Stella, the daughter. His scheme was, perhaps, to marry the girl, and then put James Speer, or Michael Stillfield, out of the way. Then the fortune of the Australian mine owner would pass to Reuben Speer, an old man in ill health, whose death might, in the natural course of events, occur at any time, and which, if hellish need arose, might be accelerated. Reuben Speer dead, the money would descend to Barto's wife, and Barto, of course, would have the handling of it. But when Barto was having, as he thought, smooth sailing, an obstacle arose in the person of Chester Brown. Stella Speer's marriage set Barto's plans awry, but he was too determined, too cunning, to become discouraged. It is my opinion that he was the means of sending Reuben Speer to Southern California, and it is also my opinion that if Speer had not died when he did, Barto would have found a way to send him out of the world. The murder of Stillfield was planned and successfully carried out. Barto has an accomplice in the woman who passed as Mrs. Lavelle. As the bedridden invalid, Barto rented the flat directly over that occupied by Stillfield. He watched his opportunity, and on an afternoon while Stillfield and his servant were out for a walk, he descended to Stillfield's bedroom—having previously made himself acquainted with the Australian millionaire's habits—and dumped his poisoned soda on the pure soda in the package. The next day he was in Boston, ready for the second move in the game. Whether or not he knew, when he reached Boston, that Reuben Speer was dead, is a question that may be determined by future investigations. It would not surprise me to discover that Barto has more than one accomplice and that Speer was sent to his death by one of them. The telegraphic dispatch did not hint at foul play, but it is so easy to put out of the way a man who has one foot in the grave and leave no trace behind, that if a murder was committed it was probably well covered up.

"Be that as it may, it is certain that while Reuben Speer lay dead at San Diego, Stella Brown was spirited away from her home under what at first appeared to be mysterious circumstances, but which in the light of the facts now at hand point unerringly to the one conclusion, and that is, that the man who induced her to leave her

home was Clint Barto. The third move in the game was made night before last, when the Hancock Express office vault was robbed of a sack of gold, containing twenty thousand dollars in bars. But one man in the world could have performed the trick of opening that vault, with its time lock, without damaging it or leaving a trace behind, and that man is Barto. Why did he rob the vault, you will ask? To obtain money for present necessities, to procure means for carrying on his campaign to the end. Those gold bars, either through the instrumentality of a third party or by his own agency, will find their way to some mint and will be converted into money. Let Barto alone for managing that detail."

"Why should he have selected Stillfield's Australian consignment?" asked Patsy.

"Because he was posted as to Stillfield's Australian affairs, and was assured that the vault would contain for that night twenty thousand dollars in treasure if it did not contain anything more. As a rule, not much money is kept in the express safe at night. Barto is a man who never acts except upon knowledge. He knew those gold bars would remain in the vault one night, and only one night, and he acted upon that knowledge. His calculations were those of a shrewd, yet daring, rascal, and I have no doubt that up to this morning he was confident that his tracks had been completely covered up."

"Who, in all the country, would suspect that the murderer and robber was Clint Barto? Barto was dead in the minds of the detectives of the country. Acting quickly and in a secret manner in New York, he then transferred his operations to Boston. He did not know that I was in town, and nothing could have been further from his calculations than that I would be in Cambridgeport on the night of the disappearance of Stella Brown, and that I would meet her husband and take up the case against himself. But now that he does know that I am on his trail, he will try to put me out of the way."

"You have got to look out for yourself, Mr. Carter."

"I always try to do that, Patsy," returned Nick, with a smile, "and if nothing occurs to prevent, I shall show Mr. Barto to-night that one of his plans for my undoing will have variations not of his making."

"Do you intend to keep that appointment for the shadower?"

"No, I shall not keep it. Barto will expect me to keep it, but I shall fool him a bunch. In dealing with cunning criminals I always, as you know, Patsy, try at times to look with their eyes and think with their minds. Clint Barto has a shadower, but he did not depend altogether upon the man. He shadowed the shadower. It would be safe for him to do so, whereas it would have been impossible to have been the real shadower himself. It is reasonable to suppose that on learning of the shadower's existence and also learned that I would use a shadower to the hospital. If he had had any previous dealings with the shadower, if he knew that he could depend upon him in success or failure, he might have believed that the secret of the appointment made for the night would be kept. But the man, whom any physiognomist would have instantly put down for a tin-horn gun, was a stranger, whose pecuniary interest in his employer was limited to five dollars. Under the circumstances, therefore, Barto would conclude that I would make that five dollars good and add something to it besides. So you see, Patsy, that he is counting on my appearance to-night as the shadower. He must not be disappointed, though he must be fooled. Somebody representing the shadower will be at the appointed place and that somebody will be you, Patsy."

"Gee, Mr. Carter!" said the bright young detective, with a smile of pleasure, "but that suits me down to the ground."

"You can make up for the part better than I can, Patsy, for you are nearer the size and appearance of the shadower. I am too stout and my face is too broad. But you will easily pass muster."

"Then you intend to make him think that I actually am the man he hired?"

"Yes. He will suppose at first that you are either Nick Carter or another detective, but before you are through talking with him I hope you will have convinced him that you are the genuine article. I will dish up a story for you that ought to pass muster."

"And what part will you play in to-night's program?"

"I shall shadow you and Mr. Barto, and in that way see that you are not harmed. If you are successful in your deception, Barto may take you to the place where he has concealed Stella Brown. And that reminds me that I must see Brown before night. He may have had another letter from his wife."

After plans for the evening had been fully arranged, Nick went to the house in South Boston where Chester Brown was staying. Brown was at home, and when he saw the detective his face lighted up with pleasure.

"I have received a letter from my wife," he said, "and she writes that she has been given permission to see me for an hour at the place where she is staying. I am to come to the subway station at the southeast corner of the Common at seven o'clock to-night. There I will find a man who will conduct me to my wife."

"How did the letter come? Your former address was Cambridgeport, and your wife could not know that you had left for South Boston."

"I telephoned the postmaster to have my mail sent here until further orders."

Nick's face wore an expression of strong disgust when this statement was made.

"You might just as well have informed your enemy that you were here and waiting resignedly to be [illegible]

That was a bad break, Mr. Brown. I am surprised that you should have made it."

[illegible] reddened with shame. [illegible] he said, looking down his [illegible]. "But, as it has occurred to him, we may [illegible] break. I can keep the appointment and [illegible] can follow me."

"Too late," said Nick, shortly. "The time has gone by for pulling off that kind of a race."

"Why so?" with a puzzled look.

"Because, knowing you are here, your enemy also knows that you are in communication with me. If you were to keep that appointment, the man who has spirited away your wife, and who wants your death, would conclude that I would take a hand in the game, and therefore you would find nobody waiting for you. This house undoubtedly under surveillance, and your enemy knows that I am here. If I had not come to you this afternoon, the program would have gone through as arranged."

Chester Brown frowned. "Hang it," he burst out, "I am dying to see my wife, and I am willing to run any kind of a risk on the chance of seeing her."

"You will never see her if you act contrary to my instructions," said Nick, rather sharply. "We are dealing with a master of cunning, and we must not play into his hand if we can avoid it." The detective went over the whole case, and then said: "I may to-night get on the track of your wife. While I am working, you must not do anything calculated to interfere with my plans."

"I will do as you wish," replied Brown, humbly.

"Then distrust every letter that comes from your wife. If herself is honest, but she has been and will be used by [illegible] the schemes of the villain who has her in his [illegible]. Do not leave this house to keep any appointment without first consulting me. You may, possibly, receive a piteous letter, one calling for immediate help. Pay no attention to it, for it will be a device of the enemy. Do not go out at all, for your life is in imminent danger."

Brown made all sorts of promises, and Nick left him, not entirely satisfied that he would keep them.

Having discovered that Nick Carter was in the field, it was [illegible] likely that Barto would try to carry out his [illegible] plans, which comprehended the arrest of Chester Brown for the murder of Michael Stillfield. An attempt, as Nick thought to put the young man out of the [illegible] could be made in accordance with some other plan.

"I will let Brown stay in South Boston to-night," said the detective to himself, "but to-morrow he must be [illegible] where Barto will not be likely to find him; that is, [illegible] to succeed in landing Mr. Barto himself to-[illegible]."

[illegible] Carter, an artist in make-up, put the finishing [illegible] on Patsy at seven o'clock. The young detective, [illegible] he worked, was the counterfeit [illegible] of the shadower.

"You'll do," said his chief, as he stood off and regarded his labors. "Your make-up is all right, and you have the man's voice down fine."

At this moment there was a call at the phone. Nick answered it, and then, without explanation, left Patsy and went out upon the street.

At eight o'clock Patsy was at the Beach Street corner, opposite the Southern Union Railway Station. Soon a slenderly built man crossed the street from the station and accosted him.

"Are you the five-dollar man?" Patsy was asked, in a rich, contralto voice. An affirmative answer being given, Clint Barto's messenger said: "Come with me, and you will hear about another job."

Patsy, knowing that his guide was a woman, started off on an adventure which turned out quite different from what he had anticipated. But he walked with free, fearless step, for he knew that not far behind him were the protecting arms of Nick Carter.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE SURPRISE OF PATSY.

Along Atlantic Avenue went the guide, the disguised Patsy following close behind. Mindful of his assumed character, the young detective did not pretend to place himself on an equality with his conductor. Therefore, he slunk to the rear when the start was made and slouched silently along the route. Somewhat to Patsy's surprise, the channel bridge was crossed, and they were soon in the outskirts of South Boston. Entering upon one of the small streets running into Dorchester Avenue, the guide presently halted in front of a tumble-down, frame building near the channel. A low whistle was given, and an answer came immediately. "It's all right," said the guide; "come on."

Around the side of the building they went and, at the door of the cellar, found awaiting them the man who had employed the shadower in the case of Nick Carter. Greeting the disguised detective with a pleasant "Good-evening!" the man, who was Clint Barto, opened the door and asked Patsy to descend. Without hesitation, but with a queer feeling in his breast, Patsy went down the stairs. The cellar must at some time in the distant past have been used as a carpenter shop, for there was the bench and there were many broken and rusty tools scattered about. There was but one window, and it was covered with an old blanket. A couple of trestles with a board across them were made to do service for seats. Barto sat down and motioned for Patsy to do the same. The guide, standing with her back against the bench, held a lighted lantern which Barto had given her at the door.

Patsy thought it prudent to open the conversation. "I made a mess of my job to-day," he said, in the voice of the shadower, "but I couldn't help it. That geezer you

put me against must have lamps in the back of his block, for he spotted me in the building and wou'd have pinched me if I hadn't scooted for the elevator shaft. But I gave him the dinky-dink at the hospital. I copped a few tricks when I was in the pen, and I put it all over him and the doc. I wasn't hurt to faze a kitten, and made them know-it-alls think I was the last rose of summer. At six o'clock to-night, when there was no one about, I separated myself from the hosp and skinned out for a hash factory. After I had trun myself outside of a square, I felt fit as a monarch and here I am, 'stanch, loyal and true, like a pig's foot in mush.'"

There was a moment's silence. Then Barto said: "Do you remember what I said to you when I gave you the job to pipe the Sandow-looking gazaba?"

"Sure!" Patsy repeated the words the shadower had used when making his confession to Nick Carter.

"Did you do any talking in the hospital?" As he spoke, Barto arose, took the lantern from the guide's hand and then, reseating himself, allowed the light to shine full in Patsy's face. This act would have disconcerted an ordinary man. But Patsy, trained to suppress his emotions and on guard against any suspicious movement, replied with an impassive countenance: "Talk? I should remark that I did talk. I chewed the bolster until that Sandow guy handed me out a chunk of his mind. 'Young man,' said he, 'you are a cure. I've met up with good ones in my day, but you are the limit.'"

"What did you tell him?" Barto's voice was cold and his eyes were glued to Patsy's face. The young detective took in the facial picture, and the hooked nose, the thin lips and the ferret eyes made him think of a bird of prey. He realized that he was confronting a master of craft, and he summoned all his wits to meet the situation.

"I made him a present of what may be the half of a true story. I told him that there was a copper in this berg who was aching to become a second Nick Carter. All he wanted as material to put him on the detective force was one big haul. 'I'm a-helpin' him,' says I to this counterfeit Sandow, 'and when he told me to-day that he had spotted a notorious New York gun and wanted to catch him in the act of doin' business, I agreed to play into his hand. He pulled out Mr. Sandow Bogus as his meat, and so I took the train and made a monkey out of myself.'"

Again there was a period of silence. At last, affected by the strong light thrown upon his face, Patsy blinked and then took out his handkerchief. Barto, with a slight smile, placed the lantern on the floor at his feet. "Didn't Sandow number two ask you what caused the policeman to suspect him?" asked Barto, giving the disguised detective a queer look.

"He did for a fact, and, by good luck, I was ready for him. I told him he was suspected from the description in a circular sent out all over the country by Inspector [illegible], of New York. The circular was straight goods. I had read it. A copper gave me one a few days ago, and may be," giving Barto a shrewd look, "you had one when you gave me the job to pipe the man."

Patsy had now made his best play. Up to this moment he knew that he had not succeeded in pulling the wool over the eyes of the shrewd, cunning rascal in front of him. But the circular, he hoped, would settle the matter in his favor. Nick Carter had happened to have it, and, when considering the plans of the night, the thought of it came to his mind. It would fit the case admirably. Reading it over again carefully, Nick became possessed with the belief that it had been printed for his especial benefit and to meet just such an emergency as had arisen.

Clint Barto, with a puzzled face, read the circular:

"FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD!

"The above reward will be paid for the arrest and conviction of David Lasser, alias Pete Flambeau, who is wanted for the train robbery and murder on the New York Central near the State line, October 18, 1902. Description: Five feet nine inches in height; weight, 170; built like a prize fighter; strong, perfectly formed face, smoothly shaven, blue eyes, fair complexion; walks straight as an arrow and looks a person boldly in the face. Resembles Eugene Sandow and also Nick Carter, the noted detective. Possibly may travel on these resemblances."

Then followed some instructions and the signature. Barto, with a serious expression, glanced from the circular to Patsy, who was unconcernedly lighting a cigarette.

"What is your opinion?" the master villain asked. "Did this man, in the light of the circular, impress you as the right one?"

"Oh, yes," replied Patsy, frankly, "he was the right one, all right."

Barto narrowed his eyes and fixed them upon Patsy with an intentness that made the young detective hold his breath in suspense in spite of all efforts at self-control. It was a hard ordeal he was undergoing, and, though he was well seasoned, he was not adamant.

"The right one," Barto repeated, with a singular inflection, "may mean something to your mind and something entirely different to my mind. But I am disposed to give you every chance."

Patsy flinched a little.

"I will put the question in another form. Did this man fully answer the description of the train robber?"

"He was disguised, but he might have been the piker that done the Central job."

"He couldn't have been Sandow, for Sandow is not in the habit of going about in disguise. Might not the man have been Nick Carter?"

Again the ferret eyes seemed to pierce Patsy to the marrow.

But he shrugged his shoulders as he replied: "He might have been Nick. I didn't ask him."

"Let us look over the situation," said Barto, smoothly. "Let us suppose, just to pass away the time, you understand, that you are not the man I hired, but a detective in disguise, sent here by the fellow who looks like Sandow, and who, we will say, is Nick Carter."

Patsy folded his arms and tried to show amused interest.

"Let us further suppose that, in pursuance of this plan, Nick Carter shadowed you and your guide to this place. Now, if such a program had been carried out, Nick Carter will be found somewhere outside. In what position would that kind of a layout put me?" Barto unconcernedly lighted a cigar, and then went on: "It would place me in the attitude of a fool, wouldn't it?"

"That's right," said Patsy, who was now feeling anything but secure.

"And neither my friends nor my enemies have, up to date, looked upon me as a fool," continued Barto, easily. "In fact, I am somewhat of a keen one. I owe my success in life to certain qualities or faculties. Among them is not that conspicuous and unsalable quality which is popularly supposed to distinguish the farmer. In a word, there is no barley in my beard."

"No one would ever take you for a Reuben," ventured Patsy, his eyes expressing admiration.

Puff, puff. "No, I am able to hoe my own row, all right. Continuing the consideration of this hypothetical case, I will tell you how I would act if you were a detective in disguise and Nick Carter had followed you here. In the first place, I would have laid a trap for Nick Carter. A difficult operation, perhaps, for Nick is a shrewd one himself. But the trick could be worked. How? By means of the sympathy racket. I am on to Nick's great failing. He is sympathetic. He can never pass a woman in distress, and he would sooner think of committing murder than of turning his back on a scene exhibiting a woman, and a pretty one at that, in dire peril. You are probably all right, but, if you are not and Nick Carter did follow you, he is now a dead man."

Patsy trembled in grief and alarm. What if this devil in human form spoke the truth? Nick Carter might have fallen a victim to some satanic wile. In that case Patsy must look to himself if he hoped to extricate himself from a position of terrible danger.

During all this time the woman garbed as a man had stood in the same position against the bench and facing Barto and Patsy. Barto now addressed her. "Well," said he, "what do you say?"

"This is the man who interviewed me in the New York flat," she answered, with positiveness.

Then Patsy saw that the game was up. The woman—the Mrs. Lavelle, of New York, the associate of the murderer of Michael Stillfield—had penetrated his disguise. With a bound he was on his feet, revolver in hand, determined to sell his life as dearly as possible. Too late. The moment he arose, his arms were caught from behind. The next instant, Barto flung himself upon him from in front and in less time than it takes to tell it, Patsy lay on the floor, bound hand and foot. Concealed behind a barrel in a corner, a roughly dressed, powerful man with a forbidding cast of countenance, had listened to the conversation and had made his appearance at the moment agreed upon.

"It's you to the boneyard," said Clint Barto, as he reseated himself on the trestle board. "Your play was a good one, but you failed to take account of my wife."

His wife! Then how could he hope to marry Stella Brown after she had been made a widow? And how else could he get in position to steal the Stillfield millions? Here was a problem that Patsy, in spite of his situation, pondered over and could find no solution for.

"You must leave him to me," said Mrs. Barto. "I have a bone to pick with him on account of that New York incident. It was the talk with me that put Nick Carter on to you."

"All right, Marion," returned Barto, promptly. "I know what you are capable of. You have been tried before. What will it be? The sewer?"

"Yes," was the vindictive reply, "after I have amused myself with him a bit."

"Then I will leave you," said Barto. "I have business in another part of South Boston, as you know, and, when it is completed, I will return. Expect me in an hour."

So saying, Barto, followed by his ill-favored confederate, left the cellar.

When their footsteps had ceased to be heard, the woman uttered a low laugh. Then, stepping forward, she knelt down and, with a knife, cut the cords which bound Patsy's limbs.

This action performed, she said, not in the voice of Mrs. Lavelle, but in that of a man: "Well, Patsy, haven't you got another think coming?"

Patsy sat up with wondering eyes, for the man who spoke was Nick Carter.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PLOTTER SHOWS HIS HAND.

Patsy had been surprised many times during his association with the great detective by the sensational cleverness of his superior, but his surprise was never greater than when Nick appeared as the woman who had gained him to the haunt of the enemy.

Before he could speak to express his wonder and his admiration, Nick said: "We have got an hour before us, and we might as well make the most of the time. I could easily have arrested Barto here, but the time is not ripe for such action. I must find Mrs. Brown, and I must get on the track of the gold bars stolen from the express office. By playing my cards well, I think I will be able to close in before morning."

"But how did you get on to the woman scheme?" asked Patsy. "Tell me the story, for I shall be on the anxious seat while I am ignorant of the details."

"It is owing to Chick that I got on to the scheme, Patsy. You know my penchant for dramatic surprises. Well, that phone call at seven o'clock was from Chick. He had just arrived from New York, and was at the Beach Street Hotel, where the real Selden Dorr is staying. He wanted to see me at once on most important business. I left you without explanation and hurried to the hotel. It is near the place appointed for your meeting with the guide, as you are aware, and, on account of its nearness, Chick very wisely concluded to stay there and wait for me. The story he had to tell gave the cue for the action which I took. There is no Mrs. Barto. There never was one, I believe. The woman you interviewed in New York is, or was, his mistress, but she is dead. She was knocked down and fatally injured in the New York this morning. A runaway team caught her as she was crossing the street. Chick had been paying her court and was a witness to the accident. She lived about an hour, long enough to make a full confession."

"Gee, but that's great," said Patsy.

"She gave the complete details of the poisoning of Michael Stillfield, fixing the crime upon Clint Barto, and her statement was sworn to before a notary who was called in by Chick for the purpose. But the most important statement, for us, was in relation to Barto's Boston side plot and the program that had been arranged for to-night. By telephone she had been ordered to come to Boston this afternoon, meet me or my substitute at the Beach Street corner, and act as guide to this building. She did not know what were Barto's designs as regarded Selden Brown, but was satisfied that he did not intend to survive her in the event that she should become a widow. And she could give no information concerning the express robbery, for she was in New York at the time.

"All this was important news, but the best for immediate use was to come. The woman was an old acquaintance. You do not know her, for you were too young to [illegible] to think when she crossed my path or I crossed hers. She was a partner of Big Bertha, the notorious [illegible] queen of the early eighties. I was the means of sending her to prison for a long term of years. After she was released, she fell in with Clint Barto and accompanied him to Australia. I at once proceeded to bank on this knowledge of the woman's identity. When she was on the turf, I had occasion to personate her, and my personation was so successful that Big Bertha was deceived. I had all her points down fine. She had a brown voice for a morning, and that was easily imitated. The main [illegible] Chick, with an [illegible] and forewarned that the [illegible] with him from New York [illegible] Barto. [illegible] then, that I lost no time in making up for the rôle I was to play. At eight o'clock I met you and acted as your guide to this place. I thought you would better perform your part if kept in ignorance of the identity of the guide. And, besides, I like surprises. They season the actions of a detective. They make the business worth while. Eh, Patsy?"

"I should pause to reflect," replied the young detective, with a grin of approval. Then he added: "But where is Chick?"

"I sent him out to the house where Chester Brown is staying. I am obliged to keep a sharp eye on that young man. He means well, but I wouldn't give a fig for his discretion. I have an idea in my head that Barto has planned big doings for to-night. He has marked out Brown for a victim, and every hour that young man lives is fraught with danger."

"I didn't like Barto's allusion to you, Mr. Carter," said Patsy. "Isn't there a chance that what he prepared for you may have descended on Chick?"

"There is a bare possibility that Chick may have fallen into a trap in spite of all my precautions," said Nick, after a moment's reflection. "But, even if he has been so unfortunate as to have stumbled into a pit, it is essential that we remain here. By leaving now, we might not only fail to find any trace of Chick, but we would lose Barto into the bargain. I have fooled the villain so far, and I am in hopes that my good luck will hold out while the night lasts. Of course, I cannot hope to deceive him in daylight."

The hour soon passed, and Clint Barto, returning, found the false Mrs. Lavelle alone in the cellar.

"How did you manage it?" he asked, in some curiosity.

In one corner of the cellar was the mouth of an inclined flume, about thirty inches square, whose other end touched the waters of the channel. By its side was a hydrant, which, when in operation, sent a huge volume of water shooting into the flume. In the days gone by, when South Boston was a village and the structures on the eastern side of the channel few and far between, the carpenter shop was an adjunct of a sawmill, and the sawed lumber intended for shipment was flumed to the channel and thence piloted to the barges below.

Nick Carter answered the question propounded by Clint Barto by pointing toward the flume. "I entertained myself for a while," he said, "and then sent him down the flume. He is food for the fishes, all right. Where is your partner?"

"He is no partner of mine," replied Barto. "He is good for a night's job once in a while, that's all."

"Aren't you afraid he will betray you?"

"No, for I hold his life in the hollow of my hand. If the police knew what I know about the fellow, they would fall all over themselves trying to get him. No, Jim Heeney is a safe proposition as far as I am concerned."

Nick was curious to know what the hold was, but he dared not ask the leading question that would suggest the answer, for fear that he would lay himself open to suspicion. But he did say this: "Did you catch Nick Carter?"

"No," said Barto, in a tone of disgust. "He was too sharp for me. I caught his assistant, Chick, though, and through Chick I hope yet to entrap Nick. I have already laid my plans for the trap."

"Do you think he will bite?"

"He is bound to," said Barto, confidently. "Ordinary devices won't do for the smart Nicholas, so I have adopted something out of the ordinary, and yet something so simple that you'll laugh when you hear what it is. Chicky, you must understand, went to a certain house to see a certain party, who is the husband of a certain young woman. He did not find the party, but he was given this note by Mr. Fulke, a very honest and simple-minded gentleman, who is the owner of the house: 'Dear Mr. Carter: I have gone away with your assistant, who says he has discovered the place where my wife is concealed. He will not have time to see you before we leave, so this note will tell where we have gone in case you come to the house this evening. The place of concealment is No. — East First Street, near the playgrounds.'

"Chicky swallowed that bait without winking, after Mr. Fulke had assured him that Brown—that's the party's name—had handed the note to him. Away he went to rescue poor Mr. Brown from the clutches of a villain. Result, Chicky fell into the soup, and is now a prisoner in the East First Street house, with a few hours to live. I would have made a stiff out of him before coming here, but I wish to have a little talk with him about Nick Carter, and as his death has been postponed. He will take a scattering part in a powder explosion at midnight.

"So much for Chicky. Now for the Nick bait. On the way from the East First Street house I thoughtfully dropped at proper distances a number of articles taken from the pockets of my victim. A handkerchief fell here, a bronze tobacco box there, and a bunch of keys there. Nick will find those articles to-night. Why do I think so? Because I know the kind of a man he is. He will miss Chick, and will go to the house of Mr. Fulke, and will there learn that his assistant got a certain note and then hurried away. Perhaps Mr. Fulke read the note. If so, all the better, for Nick will then go straight to the East First Street house and into the trap I have laid for him."

Barto paused a moment. He was about to proceed when Nick asked: "What, in your opinion, has Nick Carter been doing this evening? It is strange, isn't it, that he should have allowed his other assistant to come here to his death?"

These were hard words, but Nick was positive that he had successfully deceived the cunning villain before him.

"He is, or was, off on another lay. There was a sensational robbery the other night, and he has gone into the case. He is counting, by the help of his two assistants, on running me to earth some time to-night. If he had wanted to take a hand in the early part of this South Boston business, he would have gone to Fulke's house in place of Chick. It's a sure shot that he was off on other business when his man came here, else he would have shown up before this. And, if he had shown up, I would have been ready for him. When you came in with your man, there were a couple of fellows outside who would have settled Mr. Carter's hash in the twinkling of an eye."

"Perhaps, perhaps not," thought Nick.

"With Nick Carter out of the way," Barto went on, "I shall have a clear road. He is the only man who suspects my connection with the Stillfield affair, and he is the only man who, knowing what he does and suspecting what he suspects, is likely to strike the point at which I am aiming."

"What would you say," thought Nick, "if you knew that Mrs. Lavelle is dead, and that, before her death, she gave you away?"

But Barto, serene in his ignorance, proceeded calmly. "I have never told you all my plans, Marion, and you have had the good sense not to be inquisitive."

"Take your own time," said the false Mrs. Lavelle, without the slightest sign of eagerness. At the moment, however, Nick's heart was beating rapidly. Would the revelation he so much desired come?

"As Nick Carter will, in all probability, be laid by the heels to-night, I may as well tell you what I have done and what my program is." Barto paused, struck a match, lighted a cigar, and then continued: "In a house not many miles from here is a young lady who, to-morrow, will be a widow and who, within one month, will [illegible] second time before the altar. Rather a short period of mourning, you will say, but don't [illegible] mistake. She will not mourn the [illegible] for she will detest his memory [illegible] I have said widow, merely as a [illegible] believe, to-morrow, the [illegible] what evidence? Her [illegible] confession, which was prompted by [illegible] questions put to him in a letter written by [illegible] had so basely deceived."

Barto laughed like a fiend. The disguised detective could with difficulty restrain an impulse to spring forward and twine his fingers about the arch-villain's throat.

"This scheme of mine is the best ever," resumed Barto, rubbing his hands and grinning. "If the law would permit, I would have it patented. Do you guess how the trick was performed? No? Then I will elucidate. In this house, where the young lady is a guest without liberty, is a stanch friend of mine. You know him, my brother Perry. The interfering world does not know

that I have a brother, and therefore Mr. Perry Blunt will pass, as he has passed, for a young man of means who has recently returned from a continental trip. He is a handsome fellow, as you are aware, and possesses the gift of gab, the sweet, sympathetic voice, the power of delicate persuasion and the charm of manner so influential when brought to bear upon a pretty young woman in sore distress and so much in need of kindly, disinterested offices. During the past few days her mind has been fallowed, and the seeds, furnished by your humble servant, planted and irrigated. To-day, at Perry's suggestion, given after he had informed her that he had accidentally discovered that her husband had a wife living when he married her, she wrote to her false mate asking if the charge were true. Of course he never received the letter, but an answer will come to-morrow morning all the same. That answer, a forgery, will be blotted with tears of shame and repentance. It will admit the fraud, and will plead in extenuation the man's great love, which could not endure her marriage with Selden Dorr—that's me—and which welcomed a crime rather than eternal separation. The letter will conclude with the statement that the writer, a broken-hearted man, was about to leave the State and bury himself in some wild country. There you have it. Perry will give the young woman a day or two for lachrymal play, and then he will proceed to get in his fine work. He won't have any trouble."

So this was the scheme? Not Clint Barto for the husband, but a younger, a handsomer man, his brother. And there was every reason to believe that, without Nick's interference, the fraud would be perpetrated. No one would suspect that Perry Blunt had any connection with Clint Barto, and Barto, in hiding, could wait patiently while his confederate paved the way for the possession of Mansfield's fortune. Where was Stella Brown [illegible] what disposition had been made of her [illegible] These questions must be answered [illegible].

"[illegible]" said the pseudo Mrs. Lavelle. "[illegible] her."

"[illegible] never intended to throw you down, Madam," he replied. "You have been faithful to me and [illegible] distance."

With a [illegible] appreciation of Barto's [illegible] The latter turned his stomach. And now was the time for a bold and yet, under the circumstances, a [illegible] move.

"I would like to see the [illegible]," Nick said, with natural curiosity.

"You shall see her to-morrow," was the genial reply.

"Where have you staked her?"

The important words were spoken. Nick waited in suspense for the answer.

"Where on earth could you think of looking for her."

The disguised detective had his disappointment under a smile. He felt it would be dangerous to pursue the subject. After a moment, he said: "It might be fatal to your plans if you should conceal her much longer."

"I know that, and I am hurrying matters along as fast as I can. Her father is dead, but she must not know of the occurrence until she is the wife of Perry Blunt."

"How will she account to her father's lawyer for her disappearance?"

"She will tell him, because she is a woman without much strength of will, one who can be easily influenced, that the shock and the shame caused by the revelation of the cheat that had been practiced on her by the man she had taken for her husband was so great that she went into seclusion. Her sudden marriage with Perry Blunt will be accepted as the natural course that would be taken by a weak woman who found herself in an equivocal situation and who was properly anxious to get out of it."

"And what is to become of the deceived husband?"

"He will disappear. I believe I have said as much already. Dead men tell no tales. But I have talked enough. You now know what my cards are. Now I must go, for I have business up on East First Street."

"With Chick and the husband, I suppose?" ventured Nick.

"Yes."

"And where must I go?"

Barto looked sharply at the questioner. "Go? Why, to the home I have prepared for you, of course."

But where was it? The detective took care not to display his ignorance. Still, he made this earnest request: "You will go part of the way with me, won't you?"

The answer was a most satisfying one. "I will go with you to the house. It is but a few blocks out of the way."

Nick now breathed freely. The game at last was running to suit him.

Outside the building Barto crooked his elbow, and Nick, with an expression that would have surprised the villain could he but have seen it, inserted his arm in the opening. As they took their way up Dorchester Avenue, a man came around the corner of the building and cautiously followed them. He had not reached the roadway before there emerged from the cellar another man, who in appearance resembled the shadower Nick Carter had left lying in the hospital in Boston. This second man, who was Patsy, saw the other man and instantly flattened himself upon the ground. But too late to avoid discovery, for the man who had come from the corner of the building turned his head just as Patsy dropped.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE FOX SLIPS AWAY.

The man who had been on watch during the conversation in the cellar between Clint Barto and the false Mrs. Lavelle, drew his pistol and walked toward the crouch

ing Patsy. The locality was deserted, and yet some policeman was probably not far away. Barto's agent did not desire to use his weapon unless forced to do so by the action of his supposed enemy, whom he had at once set down as a spy. As he came forward the young detective, with his own revolver ready, waited for the signal for the ball to open. When within a few feet of Patsy, the man, with pistol pointed, said:

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

Patsy started at sound of the voice, though he had seen, as the man approached, that he was Jim Heeney, whose strong arms in the cellar had interposed in time to save the life of Barto; for, upon the denunciation by the person whom he had looked upon as Mrs. Lavelle, he would, had he not been prevented, have shot Barto dead. Heeney did not open his mouth in the cellar, and the glimpse Patsy caught of the man's features did not suggest a previous acquaintance. But, now that he had heard the man speak, he believed he was confronted by one who would prove a friend. The year before the young detective had assisted Nick Carter on a train-robbery case in the West. Jim Heeney had been arrested on suspicion, and an officer was escorting him to jail when a mob of vigilantes appeared and tried to take the prisoner from his custodian. At this juncture Patsy came on the scene. He at once sprang to the side of the officer. There was a wild mix-up, ending in the rout of the mob and the safe delivery in jail of Jim Heeney. The preliminary examination proved the prisoner's innocence. Immediately upon his discharge, Heeney hunted up Patsy and vowed eternal friendship.

"I would have been a dead one if you hadn't waded in when you did," he said, "and I'm not the lad to forget such a service. Some time you may be in a pickle. If you should get in one, I hope I may be on the spot to help you out."

Disguise had changed Heeney's looks, which accounted for Patsy's lack of recognition in the cellar.

"Hello, Jim," he called out. "don't you know me? I'm Patsy."

With a choking sound in his throat, Heeney hastily removed his revolver to his pocket, and, hurrying forward, met Patsy as he jumped to his feet. They shook hands until Patsy felt the bones in his fingers crack. The young detective cut short Heeney's tremulous flow of talk by saying: "I'm on a life-and-death chase. Explanations must come at another time. Are you on my side, or will you continue as the agent of this man Barto?"

"I'm with you till the devil's pond freezes over," was the earnest response. "The cursed hound has got me in his power, but I'll risk my neck to help you out."

"What is he held on you?" asked Patsy, who had a shrewd idea of the case.

"It was I'm wanted for the murder of the messenger [illegible] in the Colorado train robbery."

Patsy's face took on an expression of disgust. "You are a bigger fool than Thompson's colt," he said. "If you had read the papers, you would know that Santa Fe Bob has confessed that he killed the messenger and that he is now in prison under sentence of death. All the members of the gang have been either killed or arrested. You are not even suspected."

Heeney's countenance flamed savagely. "The—snake," he hissed. "I'll fix him for this."

"Come on, then, for we are losing time. Do you know where Barto and the woman have gone?"

"Yes. He will leave her at a boarding house, and we'll overhaul him before he reaches the crib on East First Street."

With quick steps Patsy and his newly found ally went down the street. As they hurried along, Patsy said: "What is Barto's program?"

'It is a damnable one. There are two men, enemies of his, in the East First Street house. They are prisoners, and the house will be fired at midnight."

"The prisoners may be rescued by the neighbors. That's not a safe scheme, Heeney."

"As Barto has planned it, it is. Between the prisoners, who are tied up, wrapped in blankets and tied again, is a keg of powder. The flames will explode the powder and blow Barto's enemies to kingdom come."

Patsy halted, struck a match and looked at his watch. It was half-past ten. He breathed a sigh of relief. There was time in plenty.

After walking about half a mile, Heeney stopped his companion at a crossing and pointed down the intersecting thoroughfare. "There, by that gate, don't you see Barto and the woman are standing. He is probably bidding her good-night."

Here Heeney was in the wrong. Instead of parting, the two went up the steps of the house and disappeared from view. "Barto has something more to say to her before he skips," said Heeney. "Shall we wait here for him to come out, or shall we hike down to the East First Street joint?"

"We will stay here, for a while at least."

Meanwhile, what was going on in the house that now sheltered Nick Carter and his deadly enemy?

Totally deceived as to the identity of the person at his side, Clint Barto accompanied the false Mrs. Lavelle to the house, where he had secured rooms in advance of the expected coming of his female confederate. At the steps he paused, ascertained by his watch that he had still some time at his disposal, and said: "I will go up with you and sit down a while before starting to finish my night's work."

Nick did not like this proposal, for there was danger that, in the bright light of the room, Barto might discover that he was being imposed upon. But he could make no objection, and so they went up the steps and on into the

living room of the suit. As Barto turned on the electric lights, Nick saw that he had a newspaper in his hand. It was the late afternoon edition of the *Post*, and Barto had picked it up in the corridor.

The villain glanced at the front page, whose scare heads were larger and blacker than usual, and Nick saw his hand tremble and a look of fear come into his eyes. But the emotion was transitory, for he carelessly threw the paper on the floor, front page down, however, and then, without looking the disguised detective in the face, said: "I'm tired. I am tired to death of all this plotting and planning. After I'm through with this case, I mean to cut loose from everything American. Some island in the South Seas, where my money might permit me to do the king act, would suit me out of sight. How would you like the rôle of queen?"

As he spoke, his eyes swept Nick's face and person.

"Nothing would please me better," replied the bogus Mrs. Lavelle, with a smile. "If you are tired, so am I."

Although the words were uttered with feeling, they did not express the emotions that were then swelling in the breast of the great detective. He knew as well as he knew that he lived and breathed, that the hour of deception had passed; that Barto now knew that he was Nick Carter, and not Mrs. Lavelle. The electric light might have enmeshed him, but the evening paper lying on the floor had, beyond question, punctured the fraud which Nick had, before his entrance into the room, so successfully carried on. Barto's agitation at sight of the big headlines, though smothered in an instant, told the observant and quick-witted man hunter that the villain was now aware, not only that Mrs. Lavelle was dead, but also that, while dying, she had confessed. And while this fact was evident, there was also evident another fact, and that was, that it was Barto's present intention to disguise his knowledge and to neither say nor do anything calculated to excite suspicion in the mind of the false Mrs. Lavelle. No attempt at murder would be made in that house. It was in too public a place. But it was the villain's plan to murder Nick that night, and the attempt would be made after they left the house, for it was beyond reason that Barto would go away and leave the detective behind.

It was now Nick's plan to so conduct himself that his enemy might not suspect that he was not alone in the knowledge of what the newspaper contained.

"I believe," said Barto, after a pause, "that I shall have to make a slight change in the night's plan. I may need help down at the East First Street house. I think I will take you along with me."

Nick did not respond with alacrity or cheerfulness. "I'll go, if you insist," was the sleepy reply, "but, to tell the truth, I would much rather stay here. I can hardly keep my eyes open."

Barto smiled a chuckle of satisfaction. He believed that the detective had not the faintest idea that his disguise had been penetrated. And now the game proceeded, each player with a card up his sleeve.

At eleven o'clock Barto and Nick left the house. They passed the corner where Patsy and Jim Heeney had halted, but there were no persons in sight.

"Who are at the house as guards?" asked Nick, with a faint show of interest.

"Two guns who have served me in the past."

"Do I know them?"

"I don't think so. One is Tim Hare—Pockmarked Tim—the bunco steerer, and the other is Ellis Cline, the yegg man."

Nick knew them both, but he said: "Never heard of them."

"I'll give you a knock down shortly," said Barto, with a grin that Nick easily interpreted.

When within a block of their destination, Jim Heeney appeared. Barto, who evidently had been expecting him, asked quickly: "Everything all right?"

"Couldn't be better. Arrangements are just as you directed."

Near where the three men were standing was a spacious vacant lot, in the middle of which a huge board sign, with a slight backward inclination, announced that the property was for sale. Barto looked toward the sign, and then at Heeney. "There is shelter and seclusion under that sign bulkhead," he said, "and we'll go over there and wait for the circus."

What was meant by these words Nick could only guess. Barto might have directed one of his tools to fire the house where Chick and Brown were confined, and it might be his present intention to stay in the neighborhood until the foul deed had been accomplished. And, again, there was the possibility that the adjournment to the shelter of the sign board meant a murderous attack on himself. With Heeney to assist him, Barto might well believe that the detective's murder would be an easy matter.

But Nick Carter was not to be caught napping. The odds were against him, but he was not dismayed. He knew not when he entered the inclosure that Heeney was his friend, but the gratifying knowledge came to him before the trio had traversed half the distance to the sign board. Heeney, who was striding behind, saw Nick's left hand swinging by his side, and, watching his opportunity, thrust into it a revolver. The moment the cold steel of the barrel touched the detective's flesh, he realized that, for some unexplainable reason, Heeney was on his side. Clutching the weapon tightly, he brought his hand behind his back. Now the capture of Barto would be easy. Nick was both sorry and glad that the time had come for turning the tables on the master villain. He was glad, for every hour that saw Barto at liberty was fraught with danger to the cause which Nick represented. And yet he was sorry, for the reason that Barto's capture now might render difficult the task of finding Stella Brown, and also

of recovering the gold stolen from the express office. But there was no way out of it. Clint Barto must be downed, and within a few minutes.

All three were close together when Barto stopped by the side of the big sign. Nick and Heeney looked at each other, and each acted at the same moment and just as Barto himself was about to take the initiative. Nick sprang at the villain from in front, Heeney attacked from behind. The struggle was short and decisive. When Barto was bound, gagged, and suffering torments both of mind and body, Nick Carter spoke:

"I think we will have to postpone that South Sea engagement. Too bad, isn't it?" Then, turning to Heeney, the detective said: "I want to thank you for your unexpected assistance. What made you turn on Barto?"

"I saw Patsy."

"Ah, yes, now I catch on. You are the man Patsy saved from the mob in Colorado last year."

"I am the man, and, besides, I have got it in good and plenty for that hound on the ground. He has had me under his thumb for weeks, making me believe my neck was in danger, when, as a matter of fact, I am in no danger at all."

Barto writhed inwardly. His heart felt like lead. After all his scheming, here he was, defeated almost at the moment of victory. A moment later, and the blood rushed into his face, and hope crept into his breast. During the struggle which had resulted in his downfall, either Heeney or Nick Carter had dropped a sheath knife. The weapon lay not far from his face. Wriggling toward it, he managed to throw his body over it without attracting suspicion. Nick and Heeney observed the wriggling, but attributed it to Barto's rage and mortification over Heeney's discovery of the cheat that had been practiced upon him.

Nick drew Heeney out of earshot. There seemed no necessity for any precaution, but the great detective acted from second nature.

"Where is Patsy?" he asked.

"Hiding around the house somewhere. We waited down the street until we saw you and Barto come out of the crib where he took you, and then we proceeded to carry out the program previously agreed upon. I was to wait for you and Barto, and act when the cue came, and he was to go to the house where Chick and this man Brown are, and keep an eye on things until you showed up."

"Then I'll go over there," said Nick, "and, while I am gone, you keep an eye on Barto. Don't remove your eyes from him for a second. He is the devil for expedients, and I shall not feel safe about him until I see him in the county jail. If there were a phone near here, I would call up the police office. As it is, I'll wait until I have [illegible] and Brown."

Barto and sat down on the ground. Exploring his pockets, he found a pipe and a package of tobacco. He had filled his pipe, and was in the act of lighting a match when, with the quickness of a cat, Clint Barto raised his head, shot his body forward, and, with a mighty thrust, drove a knife into Heeney's breast. The point reached the heart and, with one low groan, the head of the new ally of the detectives fell sidewise to the ground. Barto, stooping over the body, saw that life was extinct, and felt like shouting in the wild ferocity of his joy. But moments, to him, were precious. Nick Carter, his terrible enemy, was already near the house which held so much of value to his evil plans. Using all the caution possible, Barto hurried through the inclosure and came out on the street just in time to see the detective pass around the side of the house.

The next moment came a terrific explosion, and Barto, looking toward the house, saw flames arise and hoped that Nick Carter had arrived too late to save his friends. A later consideration of the matter induced a conclusion that was in keeping with the facts.

The villain dared not remain in the vicinity, so proceeded to remove himself as fast as his legs could carry him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CHICK MAKES HIS MARK.

The explosion occurred just as Nick Carter had placed a foot on a step at the rear door. The shock sent him backward into some tall grass, but he was quickly on his feet and was running to the door when he was stopped by Patsy, who had come from the far side of the building. The fire was raging inside, and it was death to enter. "Don't go in there, Mr. Carter," said Patsy, entreatingly, "for there is nothing in there for us."

"What do you mean?" questioned Nick, in astonishment and indignation. "Chick and Brown are in there and I'll save them or die in the attempt."

"They are not in there."

Nick's painful feeling vanished. A load was suddenly lifted from his breast.

"Then you saved them, eh?"

"No. They saved themselves. Come away from here and I will tell you all about it."

They reached the street, to meet a crowd of people and to hear the approach of the fire engines. As Nick did not desire to be interviewed, he hurried away from the scene, Patsy by his side. Just before they entered the inclosure with the sign board, Nick proposed a halt. "We can talk here," he said, "and after we are through we will go over to the place where I left Heeney and Barto."

"Then you have caught the villain, have you?" ex-

claimed Patsy, in delight. "Good for you, for now you have got the thing into your own hands."

"I'll tell my story after I have heard yours," said Nick. "From where we are standing we can keep an eye on the sign board and its surroundings. It's all right there, of course, for Heeney is quite able to take care of Mr. Barto."

"You know, Mr. Carter, that I have a high respect for your opinion," began Patsy, and hesitated.

Nick smilingly inquired: "What is it? You have some advice to give me. Out with it. I am not infallible, and you have a good, sensible head on your shoulders, my boy."

"Well, then, I don't agree with you about Heeney. He's loyal, all right, but he is not a match for Clint Barto. You are more than a match. But you are here and Jim Heeney is over there."

"I see what you are driving at, Patsy. You think it would be the safest policy to see that Barto is safe before entering upon a conversation of explanations. My boy, you are right, and we'll take in the people under the sign board before doing any talking."

What Nick found behind the sign board the reader knows. Heeney dead, murdered, and Barto escaped. The great detective had no words for the moment to express his surprise, disappointment and chagrin.

"I don't understand it," he said at last. "The cords with which bound Barto were cut with a knife. Where did he get the knife and how could he get it with his hands tied?" For a few moments he remained deep in thought. Then a light shone in his mind. Stooping down, he examined the body of Heeney. The sight of an empty sheath attached to a belt about the waist told the story. "While we were having our little mix-up, the knife must have dropped out. Afterward Barto rolled over and concealed it. I remember the rolling. If I had stayed here there might not have been any trouble, but I had to leave, for I then believed that Patsy and Brown were in deadly danger. But it is of no use to cry over spilt milk. The blow isn't a knock-out, for I have a few good punches left."

"I think, when you stop to figure it up, Mr. Carter," said Patsy, "you will find that you are a big winner on the night's game."

"Yes, I have kicked out all of Barto's props, and I'll wager that at the present moment he is hunting for a new hole. But let us get away from this place. I'll phone the police office and then we'll go to my room in Union and take stock."

Nick and Patsy sat in the great detective's room. Here Patsy told his story.

"I left you [illegible] to look out for you and Barto, and [illegible] on East First Street. Just as [illegible] could walk out of the door but [illegible] that would have put the fastest stenographer in the country out of business. Brown was in a fever to get away, and that is why Chick made the words hum. He had turned the tables on the two guards, and he and Brown were starting out to rescue Brown's wife."

"Does Chick know where she is?" asked Nick, quickly, and with a sudden rising of spirits.

"Yes."

"Then he will make the riffle. Good. And when he finds her we will have made a clean-up worth while. But go on, Patsy."

"Chick said that early in the evening he allowed himself to be flimflammed. He went to the East First Street house on the representations of a letter purporting to have been written by Brown. In the house four men attacked him. If he had been expecting the attack he would have made it mighty interesting for the outfit, but he was taken unawares. Brown had been trapped some time before. Chick said he felt like thirty cents in postage stamps when he found himself on the floor tied and wrapped in a blanket, with Clint Barto, a fiend's grin on his face, standing over him. Chick passed over what Barto said to him except the last words, which were: 'Your ship will sail at midnight.' Jim Heeney went off with Barto, leaving two men, Pockmarked Tim and Ellis Gline, to act as guards and do the finishing act. Brown and Chick lay against the middle wall of the room. Before them, in chairs, sat Pockmark and Gline. Pockmark is a cigarette fiend and Chick said he felt his hair turning white as he lay there and saw Pockmark throw away half-burned cigarettes in dangerous proximity to the keg of powder which had been placed between Chick and Brown. Chick couldn't speak on account of the gag, but he looked daggers and prayers with his eyes. But all at once Chick's hair resumed its natural color, and he hoped he would have speedy occasion to bless the tobacco habit which Pockmark had contracted, for one of the cigarette stumps fell close to his wrist.

"It was thrown carelessly away, and it was pure luck that Pockmark did not note where it fell and that Ellis Gline at that moment had his head turned and his ear cocked toward the door. Chick swung his body slightly around so as to conceal the operation he was about to perform, and in a short time he had his hands free. Now he lay on his stomach and blinked his eyes at the two guards and tried to figure out how he could remove the cords from his ankles without attracting attention.

"In overcoming Chick his captors had removed his revolvers, but had not disturbed a knife which he carried in his pocket. If he could only get at that knife he would have the game in his own hands. But he racked his brains in vain for an idea. Time passed. Pockmark smoked and smoked and never opened his mouth to speak. Gline was [illegible] At last Gline got up and moved to a corner of the room.

Pockmark followed him, and they there engaged in earnest conversation carried on in whispers. Now was Chick's opportunity. Without turning over he managed to get his hand in his pocket and secure the knife. The keg of powder which was between him and the persons of the two guards operated as a partial screen for his work. And luckily Pockmark and Gline were not regarding him at the time.

"What followed was not explained in detail, for Chick is a modest fellow. But when Pockmark and Gline came back to their seats they met with a surprise. Chick jumped them so suddenly, and he got in his work so quickly that they were knocked out before they could guess what had happened. I would have given a year of my life to have seen that fight. Chick is a corker, all right, and when it comes to whirlwind tactics, he is in it with both feet."

"Chick is a daisy," said Nick, his fine face working with joyful appreciation. "I can always bet on Chick and Patsy," patting the brave and skillful young detective on the back.

Patsy's face flushed with pleasure. "Thank you, Mr. Carter," he said, modestly, "but Chick can put it all over me." Then he resumed his story. "Brown was liberated, and the two guards, now corded up, were put through Chick's third degree. They might not be fully in the confidence of their employer, but whatever they knew Chick must know or there would be trouble. After having pounded home the promise to send them both to the lower regions by the powder route, Chick called for a show down. He got it, and he believed he got it straight, for he said he could prove the truth of their most important statement before twelve o'clock. 'If I find you have told me no lie,' he said, 'I'll release you, but if what you have told me is a fairy story, you are booked for the midnight express.'

"What they told Chick was the location of the house where Mrs. Brown is concealed. They did not know anything about the bars of gold. As for Barto, they knew of the plot to catch the detective who should keep the Beach Street appointment, but Chick felt easy on that score, for he knew that you and I had that in hand. The place where Mrs. Brown is hidden is only a mile away. Chick wanted Brown to remain behind and see that Pockmark and Gline were not interfered with, but Brown absolutely refused to take the job. He was crazy to get a sight of his wife, and insisted that he be allowed to accompany Chick. My turning up just as they were leaving the house put Chick on velvet. I could remain on guard until you, Mr. Carter, came up, and everything worked out beautifully.

"After Chick and Brown had gone I went into the house, examined the men, and had the very pleasant time that they had been put out of the way, and then returned to the outside. There was the chance that Barto or another tool of his might make a preliminary investigation of the house before your arrival, and should an enemy appear it would be bad policy for me to be found inside. Near the window on the outside I could watch both the room and the street. I was at my post when the explosion occurred. It was an accident, of course. One of Pockmark Tim's lighted cigarettes must have been thrown close to or against the keg of powder. I can account for the explosion in no other way. It was a case of hoist with your own petard. I don't think the coroner will gather up fragments enough to warrant the holding of an inquest."

"Chick will return, find the house of his late captivity in ruins, and will then hasten to Boston to look me up," said Nick. "I shall sit up for him."

To pass away the time and satisfy Patsy's curiosity, Nick described his own adventures after leaving the old building near the channel. The story told, he said: "With Clint Barto it is now a case of skip the country or devise a new plot. All his plans to secure the Stillfield millions have been knocked in the head. He knows that all the victims he had marked out for slaughter have escaped his clutches. He knows that I am free, with a full knowledge of his scheme as regards Mrs. Brown. He knows that my appearance to-night as Mrs. Lavelle meant that no harm could befall you, Patsy, and he would very properly conclude that your safety included the safety of both Chick and Brown."

"He will not leave the country until he has turned those gold bars into money," said Patsy.

"You are right, and it will be our work to try to catch him before he succeeds in this move."

"If Chick and Brown had waited until morning, Mrs. Brown might have turned up as Barto's discharged tool. After the reverses of the night Barto can have no further desire to keep her a prisoner."

"I don't know about that, Patsy, and I shall be pleased to see Chick appear with the statement that he has found and restored her to the arms of her husband."

At two o'clock in the morning Chick came into the room. His expression denoted disgust, not success.

"I don't know what you have done," he said to Nick, "but I know what I have not done. I have not found Mrs. Brown."

"Did Barto's confederates fool you?" asked Nick.

"No. They gave me straight goods, but it was straight only as far as their knowledge went. Yesterday afternoon Mrs. Brown was at a lonely house in a wood near Pleasure Bay, but she was removed just before dark, and where she has gone no one knows but Perry Blunt, and he won't tell."

"How about Clint Barto?" questioned Nick, with a slight smile.

Chick showed surprise. "Why, didn't you catch him?" he asked.

"Yes. I caught him, and he slipped through my fingers." In a few words Nick went over the events of the night.

"That's rough," was Chick's comment.

"Yes," returned Nick, "but it might be worse. The game is simplified, for one thing. But tell me what you learned at the house near Pleasure Bay."

"I found an old woman there and no other person. She is pretty foxy, but before I left her I became convinced that she does not know where Mrs. Brown has gone. She admitted that the young woman had been there, and she said the young man, meaning Perry Mann, had taken her away to see some friends in another part of the town. They went off in a closed carriage, and the old woman said the young woman was in high spirits."

"I think I understand," remarked Nick, as he smoothed his chin thoughtfully. "Barto never takes anything for granted. Although he probably believed that his plans for the night were not likely to miscarry, yet he made preparations for a remote contingency. To guard against the bare possibility of a slip, he changed the place of confinement. Now that he knows that he was bowled out in every direction, what will he do? Release Mrs. Brown and give sole attention to his gold bars, or will he try to play Mrs. Brown for a valuable card in a new game?"

"I don't see how she can be anything but an incumbrance to him," said Chick.

"If she does not come into the limelight before twenty-four hours have elapsed," replied Nick, "I shall be forced to conclude that Barto does not regard her as an incumbrance."

## CHAPTER IX.

### IN THE CAMP OF THE ENEMY.

In spite of the lateness of the hour at which they retired, the three detectives were early risers. After breakfast Nick gave Chick and Patsy certain instructions, and then went to the office of the chief of police. There great excitement was found to prevail. Arson and murder in South Boston and revelations in the Stillfield case, coupled with the intimation that Clint Barto was hiding in or near Boston, all these sensations furnished food for excited conversation.

The great detective's appearance was hailed with delight. Here was a man who did things. He listened to the reports that had come from South Boston, and then supplied the missing links. The chief and the local detectives were outspoken in their commendation of Carter's shrewdness and bravery. Barto's escape was deplored as an unavoidable, though regrettable, accident. Nick would have blushed to the roots of his hair had he been able to have listened to the compliments bestowed upon his prowess.

"Now," said the chief, when the ground had been thoroughly threshed, "we must catch Barto. You must lead in this affair, Mr. Carter, and all the boys here are at your disposal. Have you anything to suggest?"

"Thank you, chief," said Nick, earnestly. He looked thoughtfully at the floor a few moments, and then said: "There are three things to be done. Barto must be run to earth, Mrs. Brown must be restored to her husband, and the stolen bars of gold must be recovered. I would suggest that your office give sole attention to the gold matter, leaving the other branches of the case to me, with the proviso, of course, that I may call for help whenever I shall require it. Chick and Patsy are already in the field, and I think the three of us will be able to manage the Barto and Brown ends. 'Too many cooks spoil the broth,' you know. This is merely a suggestion, chief."

But the suggestion was adopted. Nick, Chick and Patsy made an invincible team. The chief recognized the fact, and so did the local detectives, though some of them would have been pleased if they could have been assigned to duty as associates of Nick's two assistants.

There were no developments until late in the afternoon. Going to his room after dinner, Nick found a note, forwarded from the chief's office, to which place it had been addressed. It was, to the detective's marked surprise, from Clint Barto, and it not only bore strongly on the Brown case, but also disclosed a new plot which the cunning brain of Barto had originated.

"Respected Nicholas," it began, "I am somewhat battered, it is true, but, all the same, I am still in the ring. Last night you smashed my combination, and came within an ace of bagging me. But I was born to good luck, and the rope that shall hang me has not yet been made. It is necessary for my plans, which include a tour of Europe, that I should procure, in addition to the twenty thousand that will come to me for the conversion into money of the gold bars, the sum of fifty thousand dollars. See how modest I have become. Yesterday I was out for a million. To-day I find that fifty thousand will content me. Can't I persuade you to assist me? You are a man of the world, and you must have made many compromises in your time. Here is the case in a nutshell: The Stillfield estate is worth over a million. Stella Brown, under her father's will, inherits all of it. Any money lender in America would to-day lend her fifty thousand dollars. Now, if you will arrange the loan, or get some one else to do it, there's a commission of five thousand. You turn up your nose; you scout the idea. Wait! You haven't heard all I have to say. In the first place, Stella Brown will assent to the arrangement. She will sign all necessary documents, and she will write a letter to her late father's lawyer, who will also be her lawyer, stating that she earnestly desires that the money be borrowed.

"That's straight, isn't it? Now, listen to this: If the loan is not made, if I do not put my hand on the fifty thousand, then Stella Brown dies! That's flat. So, Mr. Nicholas Carter, if you wish to save a good but foolish woman's life, here is your opportunity. There is no middle course. Either the money, or the death of the

woman. She is where you won't find her, so don't bank on overreaching me by a rescue. I thought I was pretty smart yesterday. To-day I can give yesterday's knowledge cards and spades. So there you are. Acceptance of my proposition must be made at once. No playing for time. Put up, or shut up. A one-line in the *Post* personal column will be your answer. Let it run thus: 'Sure, N.' or thus: 'Nix, N.' Should the answer be favorable, the preliminaries can be easily arranged. Trust me for that. CLINT BARTO."

Nick was pondering this singular communication, when Patsy appeared. He was out of breath, and it was a minute before he could speak. "Good news, eh?" said Nick, in pleased expectancy.

"I have struck a clew, I think! Mrs. Brown is somewhere in the woods, a few miles beyond Dorchester."

"How did you learn this?"

"Chick and I took different roads, as you suggested, Mr. Carter. Chick went Roxbury way, and I tackled Dorchester. Some distance on the other side of the town I fell in with an old wood chopper. He is both talkative and curious. He works along the road, and nothing escapes his keen eyes. On the road, at the junction with a lane leading into the woods, is a blacksmith shop. Well, late yesterday afternoon a closed carriage stopped at the shop, and the driver, a young man, held quite a long conversation with the blacksmith. My informant is an early riser. This morning he was up just as day was breaking. He lives in a little cabin across the road from the blacksmith shop. He was out of doors, gathering chips for a fire, when he saw a man come along the lane and rap at the window of a little room built against the rear of the shop. This is where the blacksmith, who is a bachelor, sleeps. Soon the window was raised, and the blacksmith poked out his head. The old wood chopper could see the two men plainly, but they could not see him on account of the thick bushes in front of the cabin. He said the man who talked with the blacksmith had a hooked nose. That was enough for me. He was Clint Barto."

"How long did the conversation last, and in which direction did Barto go at the end of it?"

"They talked together about fifteen minutes, and then the hook-nosed man went down the lane and out of sight."

"Had the wood chopper ever seen the blacksmith's visitor before?"

"No. He was a stranger."

"Well, what did you do after receiving this information?"

"I was quite up as a lake, and I tried the lane first. It's about a mile in length, and there is only one house on the whole distance. At this house I learned that a poor farmer, with his wife and a small army of children, lives there. I sat down under a tree, to feed my face, and worked out a few ideas on yours about the reality. There is not a house for miles around; all woods. I asked the kid if a pard of mine had passed there yesterday or to-day. As I was a poor hand at description, I suggested that she do the describing, and promised, if she struck the right man, I would squeal like a pig. The kid was about seven years old, and the idea tickled her. She described three men, but none of them answered the description of Barto, or of a young man. But, not to spoil the game, I squealed when the last description was given. Now, it's my opinion that Barto struck for the woods long before reaching this house."

"Did you see the blacksmith?"

"Sure; and, what's more, I spotted him. Do you remember Black Mart, the counterfeiter, who was sent to the pen in Missouri four years ago, and who made his escape after a year's confinement? I see you do. Well, the blacksmith is Black Mart."

Nick Carter whistled. "Patsy," said he, "you have make a ten-strike. Through Black Mart we'll catch Clint Barto. While you have been gone, Barto has sent me a letter. Read it."

Patsy took the letter, and, when he had finished reading, the detective said: "I shall answer it, but not in the way Barto wishes."

Nick found a piece of paper, wrote in lead pencil these words, and read them out to Patsy: "Must first be assured that M. B. is willing. N."

"There," he remarked, "that will have the effect of delaying the negotiations a day. Much may be accomplished in a day. Take this to the *Post*, Patsy. When you return, I'll lay out my program." Chick was with Nick when Patsy returned. Chick's day had not been productive of any discoveries, but he was smiling when Patsy came in.

"I am glad you beat me to-day," the generous-minded fellow said; "and now, with your pick up, Nick is going to call the turn on the whole Barto outfit."

"Going to try," corrected his superior. "We may win, and we may run against another snag. We'll do the best we can, and let it go at that. Now to business," speaking quickly. "We must fix that blacksmith to-night. As he lives alone, and suspects nothing, the job should be easy. After that, the woods."

The preparations took some time in the making, but shortly after dark the three detectives, by separate routes, set out for the blacksmith shop. By arrangement, they met at the wood chopper's cabin. He was an honest, old fellow, and, when he was informed that his three visitors were detectives, and that they were on the track of a murderer, who had as accomplice the blacksmith across the way, he promised to lend his assistance, if required.

It was ten o'clock before Nick, satisfied from observation that the blacksmith had retired for the night, opened an offensive campaign.

The wood chopper had remembered that the house

nosed man had rapped four times on the window when he roused the blacksmith in the morning. Acting upon this information, Nick gave the four raps.

Presently the window was raised slightly, and a voice said, growlingly: "What's up?"

"Come to the door, and I'll tell you," answered Nick, imitating Barto's voice.

"Why can't we talk here?" asked Black Mart, as he rubbed his eyes.

"Because we may be watched. I am in plain view from the road," was the sharp answer.

"All right, then," and, wholly unsuspicious of treachery, the blacksmith drew on his trousers hurriedly and then went to the door and unlocked it. His surprise and terror may be imagined when he confronted three men, and saw pointed at his head three revolvers.

"This is a horse on you, Mart," said Nick Carter, smiling. "So please elevate your hands, and don't waste any time about the operation, either!"

The blacksmith's hands went up. Nick had spoken in his natural voice, and Black Mart had heard that voice before, and, what is more to the point, he had a wholesome respect for the person who owned it. While Chick and Patsy held each a bead on the victim, Chick [illegible] and swiftly did the tying.

This labor performed, an adjournment, which did not include Patsy, was taken to the bedroom. Patsy remained outside as guard.

In the room, after a lamp had been lighted, Nick [illegible] came to the point. "We are here for information, Mart," he said, "and we are going to get it, or there will be all kinds of trouble for the gun who broke jail in Missouri. You have lately made a deal with Clint Barto. I know what the deal is, and I know how you came to make it."

"Who told you?" Black Mart broke in. Nick's words had surprised his alarm.

"No one. I have simply put two and two together and made it. Listen, and you will see that I have made no mistake. You escaped from prison and came to Madrasburg. With the lure and cry was on, you deemed it expedient to remove yourself from the sight of your fellow citizens. In the woods near this shop you constructed a habitation. It was not above ground, for there are no houses or cabins in these woods. Therefore, it was underground—some hole, burrow, or cave. After many months you reached out for your tools, and, finding that the police were not inquiring about your case, concluded to settle down and become a worthy member of society."

"That's the truth," said the prisoner; "and, if I hadn't been interfered with, I'd be on the square now."

"Precisely," assented the detective, unruffled. "You were tired of crooked work, and wanted to live like decent people. Your misfortunes, you brought up against Clint Barto, whom you had known in the West. You were here an honest blacksmith, following the trade of your innocent youth. You had bought out the smith who used to conduct this shop, and no thought of re-entering upon the old, the dangerous life, had ever crossed your mind. Here, then, you were, happy and prosperous, when Barto's evil face looked into yours. He did not at once seek to lead you from the paths of virtue. He was too foxy for that. But, when he had heard your story, when you had told him about your underground retreat in the woods, his plan was made. Probably it was not broached at his first visit. Maybe he had a number of talks with you before he proceeded to draw you into his net. Be that as it may, the time did come when your assistance was demanded. You were afraid to refuse. Perhaps your cupidity was aroused by the big reward which was promised. Anyhow, you disclosed the locality of your hole in the woods, and agreed to assist him in making it a secure retreat for a young woman who had lately come into a great fortune. The woman is there now, and Clint Barto and his brother, Perry, are with her. Have I hit the nail on the head? Your eyes are cast down. You don't answer. Then my story is the correct one; my deductions are in line with the facts. It is, therefore, up to you, Mart, to tell me exactly where that underground hole is located."

The blacksmith still kept his eyes down. His lips were closed tightly.

"You want a little prodding, I perceive," said Nick, quietly. "Very well, I'll proceed to business. You have probably studied the pros and cons of your contract with Barto; have, no doubt, been favored with Barto's sophistical disquisitions, and have made up your mind that it will be safer to keep mum than to squeal. You have figured that the law says that you have a few years coming to you in the Missouri State's prison, and that you are willing to take your medicine and enjoy, afterward, the snug, little sum which you have already received from Barto, and which you have somewhere planted, rather than give Barto away and call down upon your head the vengeance of his friends. But there is one matter which, on account of your lack of knowledge, you did not consider. You do not know, for Barto is too shrewd a scoundrel to tell you, that he is now wanted by the police for an atrocious murder in New York and a daring express robbery in Boston."

Black Mart lifted his head and looked at Nick Carter in amazement and terror. "You are not kidding me, are you?"

"I am speaking the frozen truth," said the detective, coldly, "and you know that my word can be depended upon. Clint Barto is booked for the chair, and you—as an accomplice, it will be impossible for you to prove that you were not in his confidence—will go to the pen, there to remain for the rest of your natural life. How does that prospect suit you?"

The blacksmith's face twitched. A groan escaped him. "I cave," he said, hoarsely. "You've got me foul. All you've said about my deal with Clint Barto is true. He never let on that he'd done that New York job, but he did open up on the express haul. He had to."

"Had to?" Nick's astonishment at this remark was quickly succeeded by a thought which made his eyes glitter. "Tell the truth—tell all of it," he said, sternly. "You know where that treasure is concealed, and you know where Mrs. Brown is."

"I'll admit that I do know," replied Black Mart. "But before I split on the boss I want to know where I stand."

"You stand in this position," returned Nick, with decision. "I am aware that, knowingly, you have not been the accomplice of a murderer, and I can assure you that, if you give information that shall lead to the recovery of the twenty thousand dollars in gold bars, you will not be prosecuted for helping to conceal the gold. As no charge against Barto will be made for the abduction of Mrs. Brown—the other, graver crimes, will be sufficient to satisfy the requirements of justice—you will have only your Missouri sentence to serve. Now, will you talk?"

"Yes," with an air of relief; "I'll salt Mr. Clint Barto for putting me in a hole. Here goes."

## CHAPTER X.

### THE LITTLE GIANT'S FIGHT FOR HIS LIFE.

Before Black Mart entered upon his story, Nick produced cigars. The blacksmith, after a few puffs, began: "You don't want a long spiel, and I won't give you one. You have told a good part of my story, so I'll pass to the agreement I made with Barto. He said he had a gold mine in a young woman, and he wanted to hide her in the hole I had used, and about which I had told him at our first meeting. This talk was had before he had taken her away from her home, and before he cracked the express-office safe. I hung back until after the gold-bar robbery, as I did not care to work on promises, but wanted to see the color of his money. The gold caught me. I consented to Barto's program. Night before last the bars were brought to this shop, and from here were taken to my subterranean crib in the woods."

"Just as I supposed!" commented Nick, as he blew a wreath of smoke into the air.

"Last night," Black Mart went on, "Barto's brother, who calls himself Perry Blunt, drove up with the young woman. It was a little too early for secret business, so I told him to drive on for a spell, and then come back. He did so, and at about ten o'clock I piloted him and the [illegible] in the ground."

"Did she go down willingly?" asked Nick.

"No. Blunt had told her some yarn about her husband, and she believed that she was going to meet him."

"Before you go any further describe this fellow Blunt."

"He is a good-looking man of thirty, I should say, with black eyes, black hair and a black mustache. He sports a low-crowned, narrow-rimmed derby, and has the whitest biscuit crushers I ever threw my lamps on."

"That's sufficient. Go ahead with your story."

"There's not much more to tell. They are all out there now, Barto, Blunt and the young woman. It's the game to stay there for a week. Then, if Barto's plan to squeeze fifty thousand out of the young woman succeeds, he will skip the country."

"You are sure that the only men in the hole are Barto and Blunt?"

"They are the only ones, but they have a man outside, who has a bunk in the brush. He acts as lookout."

"Who is he?"

"Sure Thing Peterson, the shell man. You know him."

"Yes, and he is a hard citizen." Then Nick asked: "When next do you expect to see Barto?"

"Early to-morrow morning. He'll probably show up about daybreak."

This was encouraging news. With Barto's forces divided, the arrest of all might be easily made. For a reason which will be readily understood, Nick Carter desired to capture Barto without assistance. He believed it would be an easy matter, for Barto would walk into a trap. But, trap or no trap, Nick was more than a match for the villain he sought to overcome.

The plan of the night was quickly arranged. Ascertaining that the underground retreat in the woods—whose location Black Mart clearly described—could be reached by either of two routes, Nick sent Patsy off on one and Chick off on the other. Their instructions were to meet near the retreat, and, when they saw Barto leave the place, to first descend upon the lookout, and then make it warm for Perry Blunt. Black Mart described the spot where the lookout was hidden, and explained how easy it would be to slip behind his nest and jump him. It was shortly after midnight when Chick and Patsy left the blacksmith's room. When they were gone, Nick said: "I believe I can trust you, Mart, but I can't take any chances. When Barto comes, I, and not you, will answer the signal. And, to prevent possible, not probable, treachery, I must gag you. I am sorry to do this, and I hope the inconvenience will be short in duration. As Barto has set no time for his coming, I will do the trick now."

Black Mart protested, but to no avail. The gag was inserted, and then Nick sat down for a period of anxious waiting. He had no fear as to the result, but he was anxious to have the affair over.

An hour passed by, when there came an unlooked-for interruption. A carriage drove up to the door of the blacksmith shop, and a loud, insistent voice called out:

"Hello, in there! Blacksmith! Hello!" The call was followed by heavy knocks against the door.

"Some one in need of blacksmith work," was Nick's first thought. Then he opened the door leading from the bedroom into the shop and shouted, with Black Mart's voice: "In a minute! Wait until I get my trousers on!"

"All right," came from the outside, in a light, clear voice.

Nick threw off his coat, put on Black Mart's hat, took up the lamp and went into the shop. There were live coals in the forge, and into them the detective thrust for a goodly portion of its length a long, heavy iron bar. Then he applied the bellows briskly. This work occupied but a few moments, and, when it was over, he called out, as he walked toward the door: "What do you want?"

"I have got an all-night drive," was the answer, "and my horse has gone lame. I think something is the matter with one of the shoes. I want you to make an examination." The tone was pleasant, and the voice was that of a stranger. But, though everything appeared to be all right, yet Nick was suspicious. After a moment's consideration of the situation, he determined to refuse the stranger's request.

"I guess you'll have to go on to the next shop," he said slowly. "I am not feeling well, and I don't care to do any work."

The stranger let fall an oath. Then he said: "Come, be obliging. I'll pay you well."

"What's in it," growled the supposititious blacksmith. "You can get it as well drive on."

There ensued a short period of silence. Nick, with the bar on the anvil by the forge and standing beside it, waited expectantly. Soon his sharp ears caught the sound of voices just raised above a whisper. The stranger was not alone. Something was on foot, something that meant harm to himself. In a flash the truth came to him. Either Barto or Blunt had been approached, the blacksmith's room when Nick and his two assistants occupied, in consequence the enemy had withstood the vigilance of Black Mart, and had then posted off to the rendezvous to report the alarm and prepare for a desperate emergency. After revelations showed that Pete Blunt was the person who made the alarming discovery.

In the tense silence of the next few minutes Nick did some responsible thinking. If only Chick and Patsy were there. But they were probably a mile away, and Nick's danger was close at hand. There was the unpleasant possibility that he would have to stand alone against the whole force of his deadly enemy. Well, so be it. Nick drew a deep breath, squared his jaws, and, with rigid muscles, braced the bar.

Suddenly, without warning, there came a terrific crash and the front door of the shop fell in. Leaping over the tree which had served as a battering-ram, four masked men, armed with pistols, knives and bludgeons, sprang in and confronted the great detective.

One shot rang out, and Nick felt the wind of the bullet as it passed his face. He fell back a few steps, as if wounded. Then a rush forward was made, but suddenly the men who had come to murder shrank back in affright, for, snatching from the fire the now red-hot iron bar, Nick Carter sprang toward them. Gifted with the strength of a gladiator, aroused to the highest pitch of savage indignation, he struck right and left, heedless of the thrusts of knives or the pop, pop, of the pistols. But the villainous crew fought wildly, without discretion. They quailed before the awful whirlwind of the enraged detective's attack. In less than five minutes after the entrance into the shop of the masked assailants, the combat was over. Leaning against the anvil, with the perspiration running down his face in streams, the blood flowing from a score of wounds, Nick Carter looked down on a quartet of dead and desperately wounded villains. The shop resembled a shambles. The only sound came from the lips of a survivor: "Water—for God's sake, water!"

There was water in the shop, and, procuring some in a dipper, Nick offered it to the man, who, as the detective approached, raised his head and said: "I'm done for, all right!"

The speaker was Clint Barto. Nick, though faint and in need of attention, examined Barto's hurts. "You will live," was his comment, "for there is nothing the matter with you beyond some broken ribs and a broken arm."

After having assured himself that all the other ruffians were dead, Nick took up his own case. He was gratified to find that his injuries were trifling. The wounds were superficial, and nearly all of them had been made with knives. After stanching the flow of blood and dressing the punctures, the detective carried Barto to the bedroom, laid him on the bed, and bandaged the broken arm. Next he removed the gag from Black Mart's mouth, and answered the blacksmith's eager questions by telling briefly what had occurred in the shop.

The story had just been finished, when Chick and Patsy arrived. With them came Mrs. Brown, a sweet-faced young woman, with innocent, appealing eyes. The sight of Barto and of Nick's sanguinary appearance brought loud exclamations from the party. Their faces bore the one expression when the tale was told.

"The Little Giant against the world!" exclaimed Chick, and Patsy added: "For a settled horse!"

Nick's two assistants had but a prosy story to unfold. They made the hole in the ground—a large room it was—to find the lookout gone, and no one in the underground room but Mrs. Brown. Barto and Perry Blunt had been gone for several hours. Mrs. Brown said that they had left in a hurry, and under great excitement. Barto presently explained that he and his men had not taken the usual route from the retreat, but had hurried through the woods to the nearest hamlet, where a team was procured, and also the services of a hostler, who, in the not long ago, had done time in Sing Sing.

"Did you find the gold, Chick?" asked Nick.

"That I did," was the quick reply. "It is all there in the hole."

"Then we'll have it," said Nick, "as soon as daylight comes."

When Mrs. Brown was informed of Barto's evil designs, when the whole vile plot of the master villain had been laid bare, her astonishment and humiliation brought on a fit of weeping. She reproached herself for her conduct, and was afraid her husband would never forgive her. Nick begged her to believe that Brown would look at the matter in another light. She had not heard of the death of her father, and Nick did not enlighten her, preferring that the communication should come from her husband.

Her account of her flight from Cambridgeport and her after experiences exhibited her gullibility and unsophistication. Barto induced her to leave her home by saying that her uncle, James Speer, had returned from Australia under a cloud, that he was dying, and had sent for her to come to him immediately. He was a very rich man, and it was his intention, so Barto said, to leave all his property to her. Barto further stated that, while her husband could probably be trusted, James Speer preferred that his [illegible] should be kept a secret. [illegible] all. Knowing nothing of the conditions [illegible] left [illegible] by Barto, and happy in the hope that her days of privation would soon come to an end. On one pretext and another, Barto kept her from her uncle's side, though she was assured that he was in the same house to which she was taken on the night of her departure from home. To ease her mind, Barto promised that she should see [illegible], and she went with Perry Blunt, introduced [illegible] her uncle's secretary, to the underground re[illegible] to keep an appointment which Barto [illegible] with Evans.

The great detective, noting her beauty and her distress, felt his contempt give way to pity.

Before Barto was removed from the locality, he confessed that in arranging the details of his villainous plot he himself figured on marrying Mrs. Brown. But Nick Carter's appearance in the field caused him to make the change. He said he had got things in such a shape that if Nick had been out of the way there would have been no difficulty in getting rid of Chester Brown. Arrested for the murder of Michael Stillfield, he would be without defense. The natural theory of the prosecution would be that, in his poverty, he desired to hasten the day that should make his wife a rich woman. On trial for his life, he would receive no aid or comfort from his wife, for she would be imbued with the belief that he was a bigamist. The trial over, Chester Brown dead, Stella would reappear in society as the wife of Perry Blunt, giving as a reason for her disappearance during the days preceding and following her husband's arrest that shame and mortification over Chester Brown's duplicity and wickedness had driven her into seclusion. She would be ready to admit that she had heard of the trial, but would affirm that her feelings were such that she could not force herself to come forward to testify either for or against the man who had nearly wrecked her life. This was a very pretty plot, but Nick Carter had spoiled it. Regarding the express robbery, Barto said that he had been assisted by Perry Blunt, who drove the cab and kept a lookout for policemen.

The great detective's sensational battle against odds in the blacksmith shop, the capture of Clint Barto, the rescue of Mrs. Stella Brown and the recovery of the twenty thousand dollars in gold bars, furnished Boston with the sensation of the year. Nick, Chick and Patsy bore their honors modestly.

Barto was taken to New York, and, after trial and conviction on the murder charge, was duly electrocuted. Mr. and Mrs. Chester Brown are at present doing the Orient.

Perry Blunt, the brother of Barto, escaped prosecution. There was a sufficient reason for it. He was one of the men who fell dead under the weight of the heavy iron bar wielded by the strong, determined arm of Nick Carter.

THE END.

[illegible] Cambridgeport [illegible]

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